It Doesn't Get Any Better Than This – Prologue

"Shake a leg; let's get this show on the road."

"I'm hurrying as fast as I can."

"Fine Moira, just hurry."

"I'm almost ready Phil, grab the diaper bag and we can go."

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Phillip (Phil) and Moira Wilson had been married 18 months and their baby, Jasmine, was 4 months old. They'd dated for 3 years before Phil screwed up his courage and asked Moira to marry him because he never felt he was good enough for her. Moira's father, Frank, was a prominent retailer in Flagstaff. Phil had been raised on a small (640 acre) ranch. He'd spoken to her father before he officially asked her to get the green light. That was very old fashioned in 2005. Frank had said it was up to Moira, so Phil bought the ring, got down on one knee and asked her.

Her only response besides squeezing the stuffing out of him and planting a few dozen kisses was to ask, "What took you so long?" They set the date for a June (2005) wedding and managed to keep their hands off of each other for 6 long months.

Phil had graduated from a land grant college (U of A, Tucson) majoring in animal husbandry and Moira from ASU (Tempe) with a major in sociology. Phil went to work for her father (Frank) and Moira went on to get her MSW. They'd met and began dating after their senior year; they were both the same age, 22, at the time. While not always idyllic, they had a good marriage.

She had to do her internship in social work after she got her masters and he tried to build a small herd of his own, buying calves from her father and working for nearly free to pay for the feed. Phil had a string of horses, 4 to be exact and 6 beef. There was an old line shack that he lived in during that time.

When Phil told John he'd popped the question, John wanted to know where they planned to live. Phil admitted that he didn't have a clue. John offered a plot of land, 5 acres, for them to build a house, with conditions. He'd deed over the land and pay for a well and the basement. The basement was the qualifier.

"One of these days, the world is going to go to hell in a handcart. It's not a question of if, only of when and what. For that reason, the basement must meet the specifications I have for it."

"What might those be?"

"First off, it has to build of reinforced concrete and be about 10' rather than 8' deep. Secondly, we're going to pour a slab over the basement, one foot thick."

"What are you building, a bomb shelter?"

"That's right! A very well equipped bomb shelter, I'm sorry your mother didn't live to see this. I've been seeing the widow Simpson and have considered remarrying. You know her Phil; her husband got gored by that bull."

"I recall hearing about it, but I was in school, remember?"

"That's right and I told you not to come home for the funeral because you didn't know him that well. No one can ever replace your mother, but a man needs a companion."

"I have no objections, Dad. So, you help with the home if the basement is a full blown bomb shelter?"

"That's right and I'll equip it with what I think it should have."

"For instance?"

"An air filtration system to filter out chemicals, biologics and radiation; standby power, probably a diesel genset, a blast door for obvious reasons and long term storage food."

"Mountain House?"

"No, I was thinking of going with Walton Feed's packages, say enough for 6 people for a year."

"What about the house?"

"If necessary I'll cosign the loan."

"Can we get it done in five months?"

"We will. Count on it."

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Dad picked the location and I agreed. He got the driller out to put in the well and a contractor to put in a septic system, way oversized for a single home. The well pump was electric with backup solar and batteries. We agreed on floor plans for 4 bedroom ranch house with $2\frac{1}{2}$ baths. There wasn't much about the home that was remarkable except for the drywall and the window shutters. The house was constructed using $\frac{3}{4}$ " drywall throughout. We had hardwood maple floors, expensive but beautiful. The appliances were propane fueled including the furnace, stove, refrigerator and freezer. I bought those. To supply the gas, he bought a used propane tank and had it refitted and repainted with aluminum paint. It was an industrial 10,000-gallons (net) tank that he added 3,000-gallons to.

After the basement walls and floors were poured, he added another freezer, a refrigerator only refrigerator he got from Sears and an electric stove. The generator was a Cummins diesel model DGBC. He bought two and had one installed at the home place. Access to the shelter was via a hatch in the floor of the utility room accessing stairs. I also bought the clothes washer and propane fueled clothes dryer. Dad spent every free moment fooling around in the basement, putting in shelving, installing the plumbing fixtures, selecting and setting up the ham radio and a tower made by US Tower for the antennas. It was a model MA-850MDP with a RMC-1000 relay controlled remote control for raising and lowering the tower. Since we already had Motorola business radios for the ranch, he added one extra CX-5M coax standoff arm for that antenna.

Once the basement was constructed and the lid cured it only took 2 days to compact the 108" of earth over the basement and form and pour the house slab. Once that cured, it took 1½ days to frame out the house. We had agreed on 2×6 frame construction to allow for more insulation which was sprayed in foam. That's where it turned curious. The outside of the house was wrapped in cloth and then insulation board. The windows and the powered shutters came next sealing the house up. The windows were fixed in place and couldn't be opened. Instead of siding, 2×6 steel framing was added and the outside topped with OSB and finally siding. Crushed rock was poured into the framing as the outside layer was added.

Apparently the roll down shutters weren't enough, 1" RHA hinged shutters were hung to provide a second layer of window protection. It took the drywall contractor a little over 2 days to install the heavy ³/₄" drywall. They taped the seams and sanded them slightly the next day before applying texture. A finish carpenter was brought in to trim out the windows hang doors and what not. The kitchen counters and other countertops were made of Corian. The kitchen plumbing that showed was all stainless steel.

The cabinets were built to match the floor and were hard maple. Dad had his basement completed well in advance of the house, although the house was coming along nicely. He also made me a full partner in the ranch, giving us a source of income. He explained that while I was an only child and would get it all eventually, he didn't mind beating the government out of some estate taxes. Additionally, I needed a regular source of income in order to qualify for the home loan.

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The big day came about a month after the house was finished. We put in some area rugs and just the necessary furniture, including a dining room set, suite for the master bedroom and two recliners and a TV for the living room. Moira and I had picked out more but decided to wait until we could pay cash for what we wanted.

When the baby came, Moira's parents accused us of naming her after a bag of Thai rice. Their wedding present had been a large check which Moira tucked away to buy the furniture later. When she got pregnant, we furnished the baby's room electing to stay with the Navajo White paint for now. We got a good crib, changing table, chest of drawers and high chair to begin with. We also got an old crib and high chair out of Dad's attic and added them to the shelter. We named the baby Jasmine.

The one thing you don't see in many new houses is a pantry. Dad insisted we put one in and it had floor to ceiling with enclosed shelves and a library ladder to reach the top shelves. We stocked it ourselves from Costco in Prescott, Wal-Mart and Sam's Club. Our ranch was about 4 miles out of Prescott just off north Arizona 89. We were pretty much surrounded by National Forests, Wilderness areas and the like.

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"What's the deal with the windows? It would be nice to get some fresh air in here."

"They're laminated Lexan about 3" thick."

"Bulletproof?"

"I hope so. But, if they're not, the shutters are."

"What was that fabric you wrapped the house in, Kevlar?"

"Close, Spectra."

"Are you living in some kind of fantasy world?"

"No, I read the papers and don't like what I've been seeing. For Christmas this year, Moira and you get rifles. For your birthdays, you get pistols and next Christmas, you get shotguns. Anyway, will you be the best man at my wedding?"

"You set a date?"

"In three weeks in front of the judge. We need witnesses and I thought maybe Moira and you would be willing."

"I'm willing and I mentioned you getting married to her. I'll ask her tonight and let you know."

Moira was like any other woman when the subject of a wedding comes up. When and where? She didn't have a nice dress and what was the bride wearing so she could have a matching outfit. I told her it was a simple civil ceremony in front of the judge and Dad would be wearing the same old suit he usually wore. I didn't know what Mrs. Simpson

would be wearing but if it bothered her, she should call and ask. Don't buy a new dress on account of the wedding, but if she wanted a new dress, just buy one.

On the day of Dad's second wedding I was forced to hurry her a bit and had to tell her to shake a leg. That brings us full circle and gives you some back ground on us. Mrs. Simpson first name was Ashley, I learned. Ashley was 5 years younger than Dad and owned the adjoining section. It took longer to get to the courthouse and the judge's chambers than it took for them to get married. That judge eliminated all of the unnecessary language out of the marriage ceremony and it was mostly some I do's and it was over.

We went out to eat at the Dry Gulch Steakhouse, one of Dad's favorite restaurants. The other choice would have been Outback and either would have been good. Doubling the size of the ranch meant changes. Rather than buying hay, we'd grow our own, along with some corn and soybeans and have it blended into cattle feed.

With the weather we have in the area, you could grow alfalfa all year long except perhaps in the coolest part of winter. We had never grown grain before and didn't have the equipment. Fortunately Ashley had a planter, cultivator and self-propelled combine and wagons to haul the grain. Land being what it is in the area, a section wouldn't support many cattle without a feedlot.

I began to wonder if Dad was right about the world situation or going through a stage. It didn't take much time on the internet before I agreed with him. Pick a place. Iran and North Korea were giving the world fits over the nuclear question. The war in Iraq seemed to be slowing down but Afghanistan was heating up. The US was negotiating some kind of nuclear deal with India and the Australians were claiming that Asia would be our next nuclear worry. Russia had first resumed bomber over flights and then talked about stationing aircraft in Cuba. Finally, the country of Georgia attacked their breakaway province, South Ossetia, and Russia invaded. Some kind of deal had been worked out between the US, France and Russia, but Russia reneged and didn't pull their troops back to the pre-invasion positions.

The US sent aircraft with humanitarian aid and later a destroyer and Coast Guard cutter into the Black Sea. Russia had all of Georgia's seaports blockaded and the hate and discontent notched up a few degrees. We added a second destroyer and a guided missile cruiser before they let our ships through, narrowly avoiding a confrontation.

Dad showed up and asked me to help him unload his pickup. It seems that Christmas and our birthday's came early. He had two Springfield Armory M1As (Loaded), two Mossberg 590A1 shotguns with the ghost ring sights and two Para Ordinance P-14s. To go with that, he had 10 cases of Lithuanian surplus 7.62×51mm, 4 cases of 12-gauge 12-pellet 00 buck, 2 cases of 12-gauge Brenneke slugs, one case each of Speer Lawman 230gr FMJ and 230gr Gold Dot .45acp.

My personal guns before that were a Winchester model 92 and Colt SSA, both in .44-40, a Winchester model 62 pump in .22LR and a Winchester model 12 pump in 12 gauge. Moira didn't own any firearms of her own, but her father Frank had taught her to shoot.

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Diesel generators called for diesel fuel, probably a lot of diesel fuel. When he bought the generators, Dad bought several cases of oil filters and several drums of oil. He also bought PRI-D to stabilize the fuel and PRI-G to stabilize the gas in the farm tanks. He ordered two new 40,000-gallon fiberglass diesel tanks from a company in Texas and had them buried and plumbed into the generators. His only problem was the price of diesel fuel. It was running in the neighborhood of \$5 a gallon and our last name was Wilson, not Rockefeller. Ashley paid for 2,000-gallons for each of the diesel tanks.

"Don't get me wrong, I surely do appreciate the firearms, but what did you get for yourself?"

"The same firearms I bought for Moira and you. I wanted a Barrett semi-auto, but they're a bit pricey. We'll just have to wait and see about buying one of those."

"I saw where the Barrett ammo runs \$4.25 per round when you buy it by the 80 round case."

"That's the other reason I didn't buy one, I couldn't afford the ammo."

"You've really been on a spending spree, did you win the Lottery?"

"When your mother died, we had an insurance policy. I took just enough to bury her and invested the balance. I've held onto the money for all these years watching that investment grow. A while back, my broker advised me to cash out and put the money in a different investment. I looked and figured he was right, but I didn't make the investment he'd hoped I'd make. Instead, I invested in our future. I actually do have the cash to buy the Barrett, for example, and get those diesel tanks nearly full. However, I put some of the money in precious metals and have been waiting to cash that out."

"Did you get a good price?"

"I bought in while you were in college. Did pretty good, got the gold for under \$300 and the silver for under \$5. I had to pay a premium for the Gold and Silver Eagles. Have you noticed the price of gold and silver lately?"

"Didn't gold slip up to over \$1,000?"

"Yes, but it came back down and is trading in the 800s. I've been thinking about recovering my initial investment and using that to buy the rifle and fill the tanks."

"I don't mean to nosey, but just how much did you buy?"

"After the funeral expenses, I had about \$92,000 to invest. The broker made a good pick and I quadrupled it. Then, I sold out, paid the taxes and invested the remainder in gold and silver at the prices I mentioned. I have the same insurance policy that we had on your mother, but it won't be worth nearly as much in terms of purchasing power. They were single premium whole life policies. We were young enough when we bought them that the premium was fairly reasonable."

"Are you a millionaire?"

"Is there anything called half-millionaire? I basically cleared around \$270,000 after taxes on the first investment. The gold and silver are near triple my investment so Ashley and I have about a half-million left after all the money I spent on the basement, generators and fuel tanks. I did manage to cash out some of the gold when it was in the \$900s."

"Wow."

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"What all have you stocked the basement with beyond the LTS food?"

"I got radiation equipment from Texas and a high range meter from a company in North Dakota. The gas masks and Tyvek suits came from Approved Gas Masks. The KIO₃ came from Medicals Corps and Mk1 kits from a friend. I got Jasmine and your next baby some kind of baby enclosures. The ammo mostly came from Ammoman. You should have seen the look on the UPS driver's face when he unloaded it. Altogether, it came to about ³/₄ of a ton. Oh, and the body armor came from Second Chance. It's Monarch 329 level IIIA with TRDs plates; close to but not quite level IV."

"What did you get for radio equipment?"

"I added another business radio, a Citizen band, a Kenwood all mode all band transceiver with the satellite card. The ham antenna is a MFJ-1798 plus there are dual Discone antennas for the scanner, a CB antenna and the business antenna. There are business band mobiles and portables plus two-meter handhelds. The scanning receiver is an Icom IC-PRC-1500. Everything is licensed, but you need to get at least a Technicians license."

"Are you sure you didn't overlook something? It might be nice to have artillery or a M1A1 tank."

"Watch your mouth Phillip. I was just scratching an itch. The way things are going, I itch all over."

"Sorry."

"We haven't quite finished with the basement; can I count on you to give me a hand?"

"Sure, what do you need?"

"Two bedrooms, beds and bedroom furniture, a kitchen table and chairs and some kind of table to use for our radio shack. Might be nice to have a sofa and we most definitely need a TV down there with a Blu-ray, DVD/VHS player for our movies. I was thinking about putting my old TV down there and then I realized it won't fit through the hatch. We'll have to go with some kind of flat panel display."

"We pulled the crib and highchair out of attic and put them in the shelter for Jasmine."

"Do you have enough infant formula and baby food?"

"Not much, it doesn't keep all that long and kids outgrow one thing and start on another. There's only a month's worth of food and formula for Jasmine."

"Diapers?"

"We can wash them in the compact washer and dryer."

"You know what? I'm going to have to sell some more gold to do some of the things I want. Screw it, I'm going to buy the Barrett and fill the fuel tanks."

I think Dad ran out of itches to scratch. He got a McMillan Tac-50, it was cheaper, the with the Nightforce NXS 12-42×56 mil dot scope, night vision rail and 8 extra magazines for about the price of the Barrett M82A1M. He bought 30 cases of the Hornady 750gr A-MAX Match ammo. By the time the basement shelter was done I couldn't think of any-thing that we didn't have. It occurred to me that in terms of preparations, it just doesn't get better than this.

After all she'd been through getting her MSW; Moira decided she wanted to be a stay at home mom. The four of us sat down and discussed several things including the state of the state, state of the nation and state of the world. Not one of us liked what we were seeing. Russia was making eyes at Ukraine, Israel kept practicing long range bombing missions and North Korea refused to allow verification of their nuclear program.

Iran had tested additional missiles and these would reach Europe, Africa and anywhere in the Middle East. They claimed that they were now running 9,000 centrifuges and it was totally clear that their nuclear program wasn't peaceful. The only unanswered question was, "When will they have the bomb?" No one had heard from Osama bin Laden for over a year and rumors were circulating that he had died. He would likely show up some day claiming the rumors of his death were greatly exaggerated.

Ashley suggested that we increase our supply of LTS foods from Walton Feed. They had a queue because everyone who wasn't a prepper was trying to become one. The wait was about 12 weeks and they didn't have some items. Mountain House couldn't fill orders until the end of 2009. Dad had her place the order and then we ordered empty 6 gallon buckets, oxygen absorbers and Mylar bags and made up our own pails.

We devoted one of our spare bedrooms to storage and filled it with case after case of things we ate. Spam, Kirkland beef, Kirkland chicken, tuna, peanut butter, coffee, tea, pasta, sauces, tomato paste, sauce mixes, bathroom tissue, Kleenex, canned vegetables, canned fruit, cigarettes (trade goods), bread flour, yeast, sugar, shortening, oil, 10 50-pound bags of rice, assorted booze (trade goods and personal consumption), etc. The list was longer, but you get the idea. We had hard red wheat, durum wheat, corn, large cartons of rolled oats, lentils, well hell, we had some of everything.

From Canning Pantry in Hyrum, Utah we ordered two All American 30 quart canners, 4 cases of regular lids and about a truck load of jars that came straight from Jardin. Wendy Mae sells the Country Living Grain Mill, motorized. We got the power bar just in case. We also got 2 repair parts kits, more grinding burrs, a different auger and the flour bin. She included a cutting board with the stuff mounted. She also sold heirloom seeds and we couldn't tell if it was the same collections as the Ark Institute had so we ordered one. We bought two other things from her, the Big Berkey and the Deluxe Squeezo for making purees and sauces. We didn't have bad water, but bought the extra filters for metals, just in case, along with sets of spare filters.

My old car threw a rod and rebuilding it would be too expense in the long run. Dad and I talked it over and we decided I should get a pickup truck we could use as a farm truck. Before I committed to that, I sat down with Moira and we discussed it.

"What kind of pickup do you have in mind?"

"Brand? Ford F-450."

"Is that a big one?"

"Their biggest. It has a diesel engine, 4x4, crew cab, rear wheel dualies and an 8' box. I priced it on the web and we're looking at about fifty-four grand. However, Dad said since it's a farm truck, he will go halves."

"Right, he's going to fire up his computer and run thirty grand off on his printer."

"I think he plans to sell some more gold."

"More?"

"Well, yeah. It's a long story, but while I was in college he cashed out his investment and turned it into gold at a price below \$300 an ounce. How do you think he's paid for everything he bought?"

"I hadn't given it any thought; probably because Daddy has accumulated a fair amount of money."

"Do your parents have someplace to go if crap hits the fan?"

"If the who does what?"

"If we have some kind of major disaster."

"Not really."

"I'll talk to Dad and we'll adjust the shelter layout so there is room for them. You said you father taught you to shoot, can you tell me what he has for firearms?"

"A bolt action rifle in 7.62×51mm, a Remington Express combo and one of those old .45s."

"The military one?"

"That's right."

"You might suggest that he get a M1A, PTR-91 or STG-58. His shotgun can modified to accept a magazine extension if it won't already. That depends on how old it is. He'll need to put in a supply of ammo too, but we do have a lot. Just remember, if we get an Electro Magnetic Pulse, most modern vehicles won't run."

"I go through Mom and she'll see that they have what they need. Maybe I can get her to come down here and you can take her shopping."

Perhaps it wasn't going to be as hard as I first thought. We got the Ford pickup and added a spare aftermarket fuel tank and electric winches front and rear. The pickup had the heavy duty 200-amp alternator. With that good to go, Moira's mother, Shelia came down to Prescott and brought her checkbook. Before we'd finished she had 2 Loaded M1As, a P-14, and a 590A1 plus a Choate magazine extension kit for the 870. We put everything in the shelter so she could break it to Frank gently.

She said to buy the ammo they needed and she'd write another check. We ordered 10 more cases of the Lithuanian surplus, a case each of Lawman and Gold Dot and a ten pack of the 7-round magazines from Ammoman. We bought the 12-gauge shotgun shells locally and stayed with the 12-pellet and Brenneke slugs. Since Frank's rifle had

a good scope according to Moira, I ordered 500 rounds of 168gr Black Hills Match BTHP. A bolt action tends to be a better sniper rifle than a semi auto, but I wouldn't throw my rifle out of bed for eating crackers.

It Doesn't Get Any Better Than This - Chapter 1

I still hadn't caught the prepping bug from Dad; he was ahead of me by a country mile. Anything he read about on the forums, saw on TV or heard about from someone he knew went into our preparations. He didn't have to sell any more of his gold after we sold cattle. We added level B Tyvek suits and gas masks for Frank and Sheila and she wrote a check to cover them and the ammo.

She traded her car in for a diesel without any electronics just in case we got an EMP or HEMP attack. Apparently they'd had words over her spending spree and had more when she traded cars. However, Frank read the papers too and he later apologized to her. He brought up the fact that it was 95 miles from Flagstaff to Prescott and that if a GTW broke out we'd probably have less than 30 minutes' notice.

They came down to visit and Frank told me sales were down, prices were up and business hadn't been this bad in years. He'd switched his IRA from stock market investments to gold back in 2002. Not paper gold, but real gold bullion. They hadn't done much prepping until Moira talked to Shelia. He took a good hard look at the state of the nation and the state of the world and made a few changes, eventually jumping on the bandwagon himself. He bought a trailer they could pull with her Dodge Ram 3500 and stocked it. He had two 55-galon drums of stabilized diesel fuel, a 12kw China diesel genset and a two year supply of food on order from Walton Feed.

Since there was a waiting period on the food from Idaho, they'd hit Costco and Sam's Club buying extra of what they typically ate. It was only a two month supply, he said, but it was far more then they'd had before. He didn't mess around; he wanted to see the basement and asked if I had any suggestions.

"I added an aftermarket long range fuel tank to the Ford. We use PRI-D to stabilize our diesel fuel plus an anti-gel to keep it from gelling. What kind of fuel economy do you get from the generator?"

"About 3 hours per gallon."

"So you have around 330 hours of run time. I think I'd add one more drum of diesel. We have radiation detection equipment we got from KI4U, but you should get a couple of CD V-742 dosimeters. Let me show you your new rifle."

"Very nice. P-14? Is that for me or Sheila?"

"She didn't seem to care much either way when I took her shopping so I think she'd settle for your 1911. The same can be said for the 590A1, she'd probably be happy with the Remington."

"How good is your first aid kit?"

"Probably average, nothing fancy."

"I play golf with a doctor friend. I'll get with him and we'll get the best one available or make one up. I should get him to write me prescriptions for my high blood pressure medicine. It has a long shelf life so maybe I'll go with a 4 or 5 year supply. I'll get an assortment of antibiotics while I'm at it. Which room is ours?"

"Dad and Ashley took the first one, Moira and I the second and the last one is for Sheila and you."

"Bunk beds?"

"The rooms are very small and we couldn't get anything bigger than a bunk bed down the hatch. We have bedding but haven't made the beds up and probably won't until we need them."

"Is that freezer full?"

"Yes, we rotate the meat from this freezer to the one in the utility room. We have one spare bedroom stocked from floor to ceiling with extra food and supplies."

"Do you think we should put in a trailer home?"

"That's up to you, but if you do, I'd go with a singlewide. You could use that China diesel for power and install a propane tank for the furnace, hot water and stove."

Business may have been bad at the present, but hadn't always been bad. Frank explained how a gold IRA worked. The investor had a choice of 24 carat bullion or US gold and silver Eagles or Canadian coins. Krugerrands weren't allowed. There were certified depositories who held your gold for you until you withdrew it. If you withdrew it early, you we responsible for the tax penalty and in his case, he could pull out his gold and silver with 24-hours' notice. He chuckled and said if he had to pull it out, there might not be an IRS to pay the penalty to.

If Frank had been angry with Sheila, he wasn't angry with me. In fact, he thought the firearms would be just fine, in case of a war. When we returned upstairs Moira and Sheila we deeply engrossed in a conversation concerning shelf stable foods. Apparently Sheila had some ideas of her own.

Three weeks later, a company from Flagstaff dropped off a new singlewide mobile home. They wanted to know where they could tie into the septic system and water, since the installation was a turnkey project. There was an empty 1,100-gallon propane tank on another truck. That night Moira got a call and Sheila wanted to know if the trailer had arrived.

Three days later, the trailer was connected up to all utilities, the propane tank filled and an ATS installed. All Frank had to do was connect the China diesel to the ATS. Instead, an installer came down with a 32kw Cummins DGBB diesel generator and an empty 10,000-gallon diesel tank. A hole was excavated for the tank and it was installed and filled and the standby generator installed and connected.

"What happened to the China diesel?"

"I still have it along with the 3 drums of stabilized diesel. I checked with the firm holding my gold and silver and was assured of 24-hour delivery regardless if it were a workday or weekend. Did they fill my tanks?"

"One thousand gallons of propane and 10,000-gallons of diesel. I added the PRI-D to the diesel tank while he was filling it; you owe me 5 gallons of PRI-D and 5 gallons of anti-gel."

"I'll have it shipped to you Phil. Did your food come Walton Feed come in yet?"

"Came in this week."

"I guess our order is still three weeks out."

"If it doesn't come in time, we have enough to cover you and Sheila."

"Man, I hope nothing happens before it comes."

"You and me both. I haven't seen any screaming headlines that suggest we're any closer to midnight."

"Huh?"

"I was referring to the doomsday clock that the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists maintains. At the moment, it's at 5 minutes before midnight."

"I sure hope we get enough warning, pulling the trailer will mean it will take 2 hours to get down there."

"Somehow I think we should know way ahead of time. We just have to watch the escalating rhetoric. If anything, we may have a few false alarms. If your supplies are all in, that could be good and you'd be able to leave them here. Did you fix up a bug out bag for Sheila's pickup?"

"No, should I?"

"Moira and I will put something together for you and you can get it next time you come down."

"We'll be there just as soon as our order from Walton Feed comes in."

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It turned out to be 4 weeks, not 3. However, Walton hadn't made any substitutions. The food went into the basement because there wasn't room for much of it in the singlewide. Frank and Sheila had gotten CCW's and she had a Galco purse for the pistol she would carry. The BOB we made up had 3 days of water and rations, a water filter, a lightweight tarp, para cord, fire starters and sundry items they could use to camp out briefly. Her pickup now sported a cross bed diesel tank, a topper, winches front and rear, a light bar with high intensity beams, solar panels charging a battery and a 1,200w inverter. He'd added a propane camp stove, electrical cooler, sleeping bags and so forth. They would take one M1A back with them and one case of the Lithuanian surplus.

Moira took her mother aside and whispered something into her ear. Sheila reacted with a big grin and a hug.

"What was that all about?"

"I'm expecting. The doctor confirmed it yesterday."

"You were going to wait until when to tell me?"

"I just told you."

"Phil, come check out what they have on the news."

"...and apparently the Russian destroyer fired on the American cruiser. The cruiser responded by firing two Harpoon missiles, sinking the Russian destroyer. According to a White House spokesman who wished to remain anonymous, elements of a carrier strike group are moving into the Black Sea.

"Moscow issued a stern warning that further activities by the US and its NATO allies to interfere with its peacekeeping mission in Ukraine would be met with such force as was necessary to keep NATO out of Ukraine and Georgia."

"What do you think?"

"It's heating up. I don't know that Moscow will let the sinking of one of its destroyers go without some kind of response. How many Harpoon missiles on a Ticonderoga class cruiser?"

"I think they have two quad packs. If they have a LAMPS, it has either Penguins or Harpoons."

"Can we get a carrier in there?"

"I don't know, the upper strait is very narrow and really pinches off at Istanbul. The question may be would we want to?"

"They claim that the first question the President always asks is, Where are the carriers?"

"I'm sure the second question he asks if, How close can we get them?"

Every question has an answer and if you look long enough, you can find it. There was a treaty that limited us to 45,000 tons of sea power. If we ignored the Montreux Convention, we could get Nimitz class carriers into the Black Sea, if we wanted to. However, the Russians have a lot of ships there. So the more important question was do we want to?

Dad and Ashley showed up about then and he wanted to know if we saw the news. I told him it looked like things were heating up. He got on my computer and checked Homeland Security. They were still at yellow. There is no way that we knew of to check the THREATCON, the DEFCON, etc. unless you knew an insider. There is nothing about Homeland Security that is reassuring. I had a link on my computer that was labeled DHI for Dept. of Homeland Insecurity.

"I think Sheila and I should go home. Tomorrow is Monday and it's usually a big day at the store."

"If you think you should Frank, that's fine. However, you have the mobile home and can stay here as long as it takes to the situation to calm down over there."

"I have to pick up those prescriptions the doctor wrote too; the pharmacy didn't have enough drugs on hand to fill them. Plus I want to pull my gold out of the IRA. If this blows over and I return it before the end of the year, no harm has been done."

They were back on Tuesday. He picked up the prescriptions, had the extensive first aid kits his doctor put together for him, with written instructions on every pill in the kits, his high blood pressure medicine and the antibiotic assortment.

"Jeez, was that an experience. My health insurance wouldn't cover all of the drugs and I had to pay for most of them out of my pocket."

"Big money?"

"Five figures. Feel free to get sick, I have a pill for everything."

"Actually, I was thinking that Moira and I should renew all of our vaccinations."

"Why?"

"Contrary to what they let you believe, many of them expire after 10 years or so. If there were some kind of major disaster, some of the diseases you were vaccinated for as a child wouldn't work. Most major cities have a clinic where people planning on foreign travel can go and get vaccinated against anything that they might pick up in the foreign country."

"There's one in Flagstaff, if I'm not mistaken."

"Frank, I think we should all get in my Ford and drive up there to get the booster shots."

"Does that include John and Ashley?"

"It includes everyone."

"Well, I don't know..."

"Think about it Frank. We have about all the preparations a family can make. Would it be something if we survived the disaster only to be taken out by a preventable illness?"

"Ok, call your Dad and we'll go whenever you say."

"We'll go tomorrow, it's too late today. I'll call him and we leave around 8am tomorrow."

The military doesn't seem to have any problem turning new recruits into pin cushions. I suspected, rather than knew, that we could get all of the major injections in a single trip. For those vaccines that might require multiple injections, we could either get the vaccine and have it administered locally or go back. That might depend on how persuasive we could be.

I had a list of childhood immunizations from the CDC website and there were some other injections reserved for specific countries, like smallpox and yellow fever. If this situation in the Black Sea heated up anymore, and the posturing of the countries involved didn't change, it might even go nuclear.

Strangely a GTW was the one thing that we were prepared for unless whomever decided to target Prescott and their aim was off by, say, 4 miles. If that happened, we'd probably never know it so I didn't dwell on it. According to the rumor mill, the military was shifting some assets. One Air Force Base that was home to a fleet of tanker aircraft now had a flight line filled with B-1Bs. A second rumor had the military buying MRAPs for use in the US. Was that for training or did they have some nefarious purpose?

Between you and me, I don't trust our government any further than I can throw the Capitol building. They don't believe in Civil Defense Shelters, except for top government officials. We had a lot of Civil Defense Shelters at one time; wouldn't it have been cheaper in the long run to just keep them up? Russia had two large shelters, one in the Urals, which were larger than everything in Washington DC inside the Beltway. On one of those History Channel Programs, Underground Cities I think, they revealed the Moscow subway system and said it ran all the way underground to that shelter in the Urals. When the program host asked his Russian host what was behind one particular wall, the answer was classified, but it had been a Civil Defense Shelter. If it was then, it probably still is now.

Under the theory of MAD, no country is willing to make a first strike because they'd lose most of their population in the retaliation. So, the Russians have extensive Shelters and based on how the Communist government treated their population, who is to say that they wouldn't make a first strike after they had everyone 'important' sheltered?

We don't have a shelter, per se, but we have one hell of a basement under my home, designed and paid for by my Dad. Our air system came from American Safe Room and cost \$3,600 while the blast hatch cost \$2,995. The automatic ventilation blower ran an additional \$595. Blast valves, there were 2 extra for the generator, ran \$395 each. He could have gotten the things from Utah Shelter Systems, but they were more expensive.

Another thing; you can't eat gold and silver. However, how much will a Federal Reserve Note be worth if we have a GTW? Legally, they are liabilities of the Federal Reserve Banks and obligations of the United States government. While 12 USC § 411 states that "Federal Reserve Notes . . . shall be redeemed in lawful money on demand" this now means only that Federal Reserve banks will exchange the notes on demand for new Federal Reserve notes, since these are now the only lawful money. Thus today the notes are backed only by the "full faith and credit of the US Government" – the government's ability to levy taxes to pay its debts. In another sense, because the notes are legal tender, they are "backed" by all the goods and services in the US economy; they have value because the public may exchange them for valued goods and services in the US economy.

Hell, they don't even make good toilet paper. Come to think of it, a bundle of Charmin or Northern tissue may be worth more than a FRN in the event of a GTW. That's sad.

Dad grumbled all the way to Flagstaff. He grumbled more on the way home. And, when I told him they'd given us the vaccine for more shots from our doctor in Prescott, I think he blew a head gasket. Ashley tried to calm him down, but he was angry with me, not her, and she didn't really succeed. I'll admit, both arms were sore, but most of the shots were out of the way. So, unless the disaster came in the form of a biological attack for which there was no vaccine, we would be covered.

Once we'd healed up a little from our ordeal and the soreness wore off, Dad was back talking about what we could do to protect the livestock. He said that ideally, we'd build a large dome for a barn and connect by a tunnel to the shelter. He went on to say that it wasn't practical and it would wipe him out financially to build it. He suggested we buy straw and put it 3 layers deep around the barn and then cover it with blue vinyl tarps. If

we did get rain, the tarps would protect the straw and if we did get radiation, the tarps would allow us to wash it off.

We had solar, a battery and an inverter installed to run the well pump in case we lost electricity and the generator wouldn't run. Moira had suggested right after we moved in to start adding Sharp 224 watt panels (ND-224U1F) to our south facing roof. It averaged out that we added 1 per month and there were 30 panels. They were covered so they didn't wear out before we might need them. The batteries and inverters went into the basement and could be switched to the ATS via a DTQP switch. The AGM batteries didn't really take a lot of space, they we stacked on some super heavy duty shelving Dad and I built.

At the moment, we had 6,700w capacity and the inverter had an 8,000w limit. Frank helped and we added three more panels. I ordered a second inverter to have one on hand for when we added more panels or to use as a backup if the one we had failed. I kept the batteries charged using a battery charger. It was emergency power for when we had to service the generator. We wouldn't be able to run much, but that would be enough for the few minutes it took to change the oil and filter.

He bought three truckloads of oat straw and the three of us began stacking it. That chore was interspersed with our watching the news, mostly Fox News. The closest I can come to describing what we were watching was that it was like assembling a jigsaw puzzle. Sometimes a piece would fit into the growing calamity and other times, no one could tell where it fit. This thing was being stretched out, intentionally or unintentionally, and one of these days Russia would end up sinking one of our ships just as we had sunk one of theirs.

What worried us most, by now, was the fact that the US had added the carrier to the group of ships in the Black Sea. The strike group consisted of the Harry S. Truman Carrier, 2 FFGs, 3 DDGs, 2 CGs, a T-AOE and two Virginia class fast attack subs. Five Aegis ships would tempt anyone, but they had extensive missile defenses. How then could anyone take out the entire group? The 4 Russian subs during the Cuban Missile Crisis each carried 2 nuclear torpedoes according to Russian claims. Would a couple of nuclear torpedoes take out a Carrier Strike Group?

Whether they would or would not remained elusive because the CSG wasn't attacked. However, it was joined by the Iwo Jima Expeditionary Strike Group, upping the payoff. Even if the Russian submarines were detected on launch of their torpedoes, the worst that could happen was that the 2 Virginia class subs might sink two of them. They used 4 of the Bars (NATO: Akula) class subs each armed with 2 nuclear torpedoes. The plan was that each of the 4 would launch one nuclear torpedo and, if necessary and they survived, the other one. They could choose between two kinds of torpedoes, the VA-111 Shkval or the Russian type 65-73 which entered service in 1973 and was a 20kt unguided nuclear torpedo. ...has declared a Defense Emergency due to our Black Sea Task Group being destroyed by presumed Russian nuclear torpedoes. Russia first claimed to have nuclear torpedoes during the Cuban Missile Crisis. According our information, they possess possibly two types of nuclear torpedoes at this time, the type 65-73 and the type VA-111. As stated at the beginning of this broadcast, we are waiting for an announcement from the White House. We pause now for a commercial break.

"I guess we got the straw in and covered just in time. Here I was saying not long ago that it doesn't get any better than this. Wait, there's McCain."

My fellow Americans,

It is with a heavy heart that I come to you today with news that an attack was launched against the Harry S. Truman Carrier Strike Group and the Iwo Jima Expeditionary Strike Group positioned in the Black Sea in support of Ukraine and Georgia. Apparently multiple nuclear torpedoes were launched and... excuse me... What? Are you sure?

Our status has changed from a Defense Emergency to an Air Defense Emergency. I am informed by NORAD that our satellites picked up multiple launches from Russia. Our Ballistic Missile Defense cannot cope with the number of weapons launched. Please take cover immediately.

Good morning.

"Right Mr. President, well just run down to our local Civil Defense Shelter."

"We have a shelter."

"A lot of people don't, Dad."

"Let quit standing around and talking and get down there."

"We have to put straw over the barn doors."

"You and I can do that while they empty the refrigerator."

When we got back they were done with the refrigerator and I said, "Ladies first, I'll hold Jasmine while you go down. We probably only have about 15 minutes."

In saying 15 minutes, I was taking into account all the delays that probably occurred as the word worked its way up the chain. The chain of command for a situation like this was probably as short as it could be, a General in Colorado speaking directly to the President or Joint Chiefs. Apparently whoever took the call was brave enough to interrupt the Commander in Chief. Still it was better if we were secure in the shelter before the warheads hit. If one were too close, there was the danger of gamma radiation. Dad knew what we were up against and after we dogged the hatch, he sat us all down and explained it. Most of his information came from the article listed above from Wiki and it made it very clear that without some kind of shelter, there was a good chance your butt was toast. He lowered the tower, keeping the antennas close to the ground. Then, he connected the AMP 200 and the CD V-717. He charged up 9 dosimeters and passed them out. Jasmine and Moira got 2 dosimeters, a CD V-742 200R and an Arrow-Tech 200mR.

I can tell you that nothing hit too close to us because the ground didn't shake badly. Even a burst at altitude would cause the ground to shake if it was close enough. Crap, bad things happen in threes. They destroyed our Black Sea Fleet, that was one, and they destroyed the country, that was two. It was all going to happen in God's time, not ours, so I put it to the back of my mind.

"Phil, you should be careful what you wish for."

"Huh?"

"I heard you say it doesn't get any better than this. Actually, it doesn't get any worse than this."

"Sure it could."

"How can you say that?"

"The Earth could be hit by a planet killer asteroid or Yellowstone could erupt in a Supervolcano."

"Are those the choices?"

"No, just things that could possibly be worse than a GTW."

"Never in my 55 years have I heard such talk of doom and gloom," Frank responded. "John I initially thought you were crazy, but you were crazy like a fox. Thank you for a place in the shelter."

"It wasn't much, we just had to move a couple of walls and stack the bunk beds from the single bunk arrangement."

It Doesn't Get Any Better Than This - Chapter 2

"Where do we go from here?"

"Nowhere. We sit and watch the AMP 200 and the CD V-717 and get the peak radiation levels. I plug those in a spreadsheet and find out how long we have to stay down here."

We had entered the shelter when the President called an Air Defense Alert. We were totally unaware of what happened after. Well, the ground hadn't shaken badly, but that was about all we knew. It seems that the ground had, in fact, shook, but we didn't feel it that much. The Chinese top some of their missiles with 5mT weapons. Three 5mT weapons is a total of 15mT, but if used wisely, came be far more than 15mT in effect. And, if you use 2 sets of three missiles with each set aimed at the same spot, you might be able to create a worse disaster than the Russian missiles.

What could be worse than a GTW? The Chinese had two principal targets, Long Valley Caldera and Yellowstone. Neither of the two seemed likely to erupt anytime soon, but by releasing the pressure on the magma chambers, they did. The first eruption of Yellowstone 2 million years ago released 2,450km³ of lava, but the lava met resistance. The only eruption of Long Valley Caldera we know of released 580km³ of lava. But the lava met resistance. We actually felt Long Valley but assumed it was perhaps a nuke going off in Phoenix, a long ways off. We shouldn't have been so confident, or I should have kept my mouth shut.

Neither Yellowstone nor Long Valley gave off a lot of radiation; they gave off ash. Yellowstone was estimated at 4,900km³ and long Valley at 1,150km³. But we didn't know that. We wouldn't know for certain until radio communications were restored once the ionizing radiation fell off and far away survivors reported ash falls. At first we discounted those reports as fallout from ground bursts; we were wrong. And, I am getting about 5 years ahead of the story because it wasn't until then that someone from the USGS estimated the amount of ash. Ash is very dense, as only 100 millimeters (3.9 in) of ash leads to the collapse of weaker roofs. A fall of 300 millimeters (12 in) leads to the death of most vegetation, livestock, the wiping out of aquatic life in nearby lakes and rivers, and unusable roads. Accompanied by rain and lightning, ash fall leads to power outages, prevents communication, and disorients people

The Chinese missile involved was the DF-5. It could reach the western US and perhaps that's why they chose the targets they did. You're familiar with the DF-5 (CSS-4), hydrazine and nitrogen tetroxide. Has to be pulled out of the tunnel, erected and fueled before it can be launched and its maximum range is around 13,000 kilometers. Yeah, that one. Maybe in a past life, I worked at the Rocket Site and lived through the Cuban Missile Crisis and was afraid every day after that.

"This can't be right."

"What can't be right?"

"The radiation readings differ between the CD V-717 and the AMP 200."

"Are the sensors in the same place?"

"No, one is out in the open and the other is basically sheltered."

"Which one reads lower?"

"The one out in the open reads lower. If anything, it should read higher, but it doesn't. We couldn't have a nuclear winter this quickly, could we?"

"You wouldn't think so; it would take the Earth a while to cool off."

Bzzz that might be wrong. In 1983, R.P. Turco, O.B. Toon, T.P. Ackerman, J.B. Pollack, and Carl Sagan (referred to as TTAPS) published a paper entitled *Global Atmospheric Consequences of Nuclear Was* which is the foundation that the nuclear winter theory is based on.

The theory states that nuclear explosions will set off firestorms in the cities and surrounding forest areas. The small particles of soot are carried high into the atmosphere. The smoke will block the sun's light for weeks or months. The land temperatures would fall below freezing.

This combination of reduced temperatures and reduced light levels would have catastrophic ecological consequences. Average light levels would be below the minimum required for photosynthesis during the first 30-40 days after the explosion and most fresh water would be frozen. The TTAPS study concluded: "...the possibility of the extinction of Homo Sapiens cannot be excluded." This effect is similar to what may have killed the dinosaurs.

"What if Carl Sagan and the others were wrong?"

"What if they were right? Given the choice between the two answers, I'd prefer to think they were right and be pleasantly surprised if they were wrong. Right now, I'm more concerned about the difference in the two radiation instruments."

"The only thing I can think of is that something is covering the one out in the open. Or possibly that one of the meters is out of calibration."

"They can't be out of calibration, I just had them recalibrated."

"Then, something must be covering it, but what?"

"I didn't build a periscope in this submarine and there aren't outside cameras."

"So, what are we going to do?"

"Trust the meter with the higher reading."

"But, what if it's wrong?"

"We won't run out of food or water anytime soon so don't worry about it. When we go up to check on the livestock, we'll check the probes then."

The water tanks used float switches and the livestock would have water. We still had to go upstairs and outside to feed them grain. Frank, Dad and I crawled into our Tyvex suits and put on gas masks. We were carrying the CD V-715 to compare it to the two widely differing radiation levels. When we cleared the hatch, it was into the dark; at noon, no less.

"What the hell?"

"I don't know what it is, but I can barely see the barn from here."

"What's that on the ground?"

"Gray snow?"

"What's the radiation level?"

"The AMP 200 is right, 7R. We'll have to find the probe for the CD V-717 and clean if off."

"We'd better do the livestock first."

"Ashley, will you pass up 3 MagLites and a long rope?"

Flashlights in hand, we shoved on the door moving the ash accumulation aside. We tied the rope to one of the porch posts and struck off wading ash to the barn. In some places it wasn't too thick, 6" or less and in other areas, it had drifted to piles as high as 18". I tested a sample and it was radioactive. We made short work of feeding the livestock and returned to the house after cleaning of the probe.

"Now what?"

"What do you mean?"

"We have to decontaminate these suits and get the ash off. I read somewhere that ash combined with rain turns into something like cement and it increases in weight something like 10 times."

"We use your hose and wash it off on the porch. We can come back in and check and if we're ok, return to the shelter."

The house stood about 30" off the ground, thus the porch. There was ash drifted up against the porch and what little water we used was immediately sucked up. Between the basement lid and the concrete slab the house set on was about 9' of heavily compacted soil. The stairs down to the shelter was close to 20'+ long and not for the faint hearted.

"What did you see?"

"Moira, it was dark as night. Sort of like Yakima when Mt. St. Helen's blew. We have ash drifted up to 18" deep in some places."

"Ash? Are you sure it isn't fallout?"

"It is mildly radioactive, but that could be from a number of causes. But, it's ash none-theless."

"The meters are giving the same reading now. I don't get it, if the ash is radioactive, the meters should have had the same reading."

"The ash was less radioactive than the fallout, I think."

"How could you know something like that?"

"We generally downwind of LA and as spread out as LA is, they'd have had to use multiple weapons to wipe it out."

"Ok, what about the ash?"

"Something erupted."

"You think so? What was your first clue?"

"Something big erupted was what I meant."

"There are only two active calderas, Yellowstone in Wyoming and Long Valley in California."

"Someone must have nuked one of them causing it to erupt."

"Wait, I have the Yellowstone file on my computer. It shows the amount of ash from several different eruptions; let me pull it up. Here you go, Huckleberry Ridge was 2,450km³, Mesa Falls was 280km³, Long Valley was 580km³ and Lava Creek was

1,000km³. The biggest other eruption it shows is Tambora in 1815 at 50km³. There are maps of where the ash fell for the first four."

"Did they all cover us in ash?"

"Mesa Falls didn't but the others all did."

"What if they decided to nuke them both?"

"We'll end up with one hell of a lot of ash if they both blew. Phil I think that our best working hypothesis is that someone attacked one of the calderas with sufficient force to cause a Supervolcano. That would give them a lot of bang for their buck."

"You're talking about a combined nuclear/volcanic winter. I don't believe anyone has dreamed up such a scenario."

"Some of those patriot fiction writers have. I think the first one I read came out after that BBC special Supervolcano aired. I could be wrong, but the author seemed to have hot rocks in the air all the way to the east coast."

"I've seen Supervolcano, have you Frank?"

"Sure have Phil. The eruption they dramatized seemed to be larger than Huckleberry Ridge. I wonder what it's going to be like when we leave the shelter. I can't help but believe no one will be growing food for some time to come."

"Dad, have you picked up anything on the radio yet?"

"Sure have – static."

"Wait just one minute you guys. I'm pregnant. Am I going to end up delivering our new baby in the shelter?"

"Moira, that depends," Dad offered. "The radiation will surely be down to an acceptable level long before your due date, or what you told Ashley was you due date. I have no experience with a Supervolcano and no one alive on the planet has. A volcano puts as much or more ash in the air blocking sunlight than a nuclear war. The TTAPS study assumed 5,000mT of weapons. I seriously doubt the combined total reached that level. However, a more recent study examined the effects of a nuclear winter arising from a regional conflict. I guess that what I'm trying to say it, nobody knows the answer to your question."

"Look at the bright side honey; we alive and reasonably comfortable. When the radiation level falls we can move up to the house. When the ash fall diminishes sufficiently, we can begin to move around outside. Maybe we can get to Prescott and maybe not. We can figure out some way to grow the food we need, maybe a green house."

I had the feeling she was less than totally reassured. Dad, Frank and I talked time to time about the possibilities, including a greenhouse. Dad took the need for a greenhouse as a given. Frank raised the question of where we might find one. Dad chuckled; it was the sort of chuckle that said he had thought it through and already had the solution. He didn't explain and I assumed that when he wanted us to know, he'd tell us.

The shelter was extremely well stocked with LTS food. Dad had bought a six person supply in the beginning, Ashley ordered another four years and Frank and Sheila added two years. We had two years for the six adults and Jasmine didn't eat a lot, in comparison. Plus all of that food I'd mentioned earlier was either in the shelter or stored in that one spare bedroom. We had all the time we needed to figure out a solution to the food problem.

The peak radiation level was 705R. Dad said it would fall to the maximum level in about 10 weeks but it would take about 20 weeks to fall below 50mR and Moira and Jasmine weren't going top side before then. He went on to say that it would be in our best interests to sleep in the shelter until Moira and Jasmine could leave.

The average gestational period for humans is 40 weeks by gestational age and 38 weeks by fertilization age. This is divided into three trimesters. A full-term human pregnancy is considered to be 40 weeks (280 days), though pregnancy lengths between 38 and 42 weeks are considered normal. The difference between the two ages is the amount of time it takes the egg to travel to the uterus and be fertilized. By the time the doctor confirmed Moira's pregnancy, she was 6 weeks into her 280 days, meaning the baby was due in 238 days. She would be out of the shelter in roughly half that, so we had an urgent need to see if we could come up with medical care in Prescott.

We'd been hit by a double whammy, WW III and a Supervolcano. The only bright side, if there was one, was that we'd be out of the shelter before the baby was due. How hard could it be to travel only 4 miles?

For the next 10 weeks, we three men made a brief trip to the barn to feed the livestock every other day and in general to observe the amount of accumulating ash. It just seemed like way too much for either Yellowstone or Long Valley to produce. We couldn't speculate beyond thinking perhaps the one that blew produced an extraordinary amount of ash or the winds drifted extra our way. The radio was useless because of the electrostatic charged ash.

The amount of ash in the air was reducing and it no longer seemed like midnight at noon. On the other hand, the air was far from clear. We were being especially careful because the ash was abrasive and could do a job on the gas mask lenses. Every trip seemed to be an excuse to raise the question about our growing food. Dad's response was always a chuckle, but he not once said what that was about. Finally Frank had had enough of Dad's chuckling and all but squared off with him.

"What are you chuckling about John? What do you know that we don't? This isn't funny!"

"Well... what kind of prepper would I be if I hadn't prepared for this kind of event? I didn't know that we'd have a double disaster, but I presumed that Carl Sagan, rest his soul, may have been right. There's company down in Texas that sells greenhouses and greenhouse kits. They have a really unusual name, Texas Greenhouse Company. I have an American Classic 30'x60' tucked away in my machine shed. When Ashley and I got married, I had to build a machine shed so I just made it large to use as a combined machine shed, storage building."

"Well, I'll be damned."

"Probably. Anyway, I didn't know if we could count on the sun or not. I considered adding florescent fixtures and grow lamps, but got talked out of grow lamps in favor of putting a cool white and a warm white bulb on each side of the 4-bulb fixtures. Saved a bundle and it allowed me to buy at least double the number bulbs I'd have had otherwise."

"This sounds like a big job, Dad."

"It may well be, Phil. But if you'd rather not help, feel free to go hungry. The guy I spoke to said they didn't normally sell the large kits, but if I insisted, they'd make an exception. I told him I wanted a greenhouse to store in case we ever needed to erect it. He made some crack about me being another one of those survivalists and said to inspect the shipment carefully because they had a limited warranty period."

"When did you get it?"

"Just after Ashley and I got married and I built that machine shed. Get the wax out."

We came out after 10 weeks, but only during the daytime. Moira and Jasmine were allowed to come up for the evening meal. We went to Dad's and hauled back the boxes of greenhouse components. Stage one was erecting a stone wall around the perimeter, except for the doorways. After, we started at one end erecting sections and moving to the front door. It took us about 30 days by the time it was assembled, light fixtures installed and a power lead run from the fuse box.

Dad had dozens of bags of potting soil he'd picked up somewhere, probably Wal-Mart. He also had red clay pots of various sizes, plus growing trays. While Ashley and Sheila started planting the heirloom seeds, we three men made a trip to Prescott. When we got to the edge of town, a road block had the road closed.

"Is that you John? Hell, we figured that you didn't make it."

"I obviously did. Phil's wife Moira is 5-6 months along. Did any doctors make it through this mess?"

"A couple. One of them will only tell us his first name, Rick, and he said he was an ER doc. His wife is a pharmacist. Didn't exactly tell us where he lives, either. Somewhere off towards Sedona. Ex Air Force pilot. Are you here for a doctor or food?"

"We have enough food, but thought Moira should be seen by a doctor."

"Got any food to spare?"

"Not now. Might when the greenhouse crops come in, hard to say."

"We're in about the same shape; we have food, but none to share. You'd be welcome to bring Moira into town and have the doc check her over. Nice rifle, what is it?"

"M1A, semi-auto gas piston operated magazine fed. The handgun is a P-14. Say, got any diesel to spare?"

"Might, don't know because we can't get power to the pumps."

"If I can, mind if we take some diesel?"

"We get 25% of all you recover."

"Five percent."

"Twenty."

"Ten."

"Fifteen, final offer."

"Fifteen it is."

When Dad held out his hand to shake on the deal, the guy stepped back, shying away.

"I'll take you word on it John, been some illness around and I don't want it. Say, you have a ham radio, don't you? Seen your tower from the road."

"Sure do and we're not getting anything except static. Any fuel tankers around we can use to haul the diesel?"

"One or two."

"Do you have someplace to store your share?"

"We'll come up with something. When will you be coming for the fuel?"

"We'll do that tomorrow and bring Moira to see the doctor."

In the worst case scenario, we had used up 4,500-gallons of diesel and Dad had used even less. In his case it was just enough to keep the freezer and refrigerator going and provide the power for the furnace, if it kicked on. Therefore, one tanker of 8,000-gallons would top us off completely. Per our agreement, if we took 16,000-gallons, we'd have to give them 2,400-gallons. We decided that we'd pump a double tanker load and then pump their 2,400 gallons. We'd use Frank's China diesel portable to provide the power, it was rated at 12kw 1ph/3ph so that should be enough.

Damn, I'd forgotten Frank's diesel tank and that would require fuel too. His generator a lesser amount of diesel but his tank was smaller. We'd be able to top them all off at least once and probably have some left over. However, if we could get a second tanker, we could stabilize the fuel and save it for later. Dad said he had more than enough PRI products to last us. I hoped so, he'd put 15 gallons of PRI-D in each of our fuel tanks; Frank got 5.

I should point out that the model of generators we had, the DGBB and the DGBC were not considered to be residential generators but rather industrial generators. The distinction, I believe, is that the industrial generators are expected to have longer lifetimes, perhaps as long as two years if properly cared for. It didn't matter because Dad had engine rebuild kits and Frank's generator had the exact same engine. If his alternator failed, he could replace it with the one spare alternator we had giving him the same capacity to generate electricity as we had.

About the only thing that bothered me was the distance between Dad's place and our place. The 5 acres he had given us were at the far edge of his property while his home was at the corner of the property he retained. Ashley's ranch had a farmstead but it had been empty since she and Dad got married. She kept the propane tank filled and kept the thermostat at 55°. Her husband had installed a diesel generator, QD 12500, which supplied 100amps at 120v. However, he had also installed a 14,000-gallon tank and had filled and stabilized it before he was gored by the bull and died. She hadn't added fuel to it since then.

However, before the war, the generator had only been run for the 15 minute cycle once a month and at 25%, it only burned about 0.11gph with no load. For all practical purposes, the tank had been full when the balloon went up. And even now it was probably more full than empty. Dad added 7 gallons of PRI-D and anti-gel when we topped the tank off. On account of filling 4 tanks back to full, we needed a second load of diesel fuel. They found another tanker and we took 32,000 gallons this time, leaving them with 4,800 gallons. It was time to hit I-17 and look for tanker trucks. The visibility was poor, somewhere between ½ and ¾ mile. We had a general list of what we wanted with food and fuel topping our list. Anything else we could add would be a bonus. And, considering the situation anything we did would be better than this.

"I have that extra inverter and if we could find more solar panels and batteries so we might be able to shut down one or more of the generators. It would really be nice if we could find a shipment of solar equipment or a wind turbine.

"We're going to concentrate on fuel and food first, Phil. The other things we might find will be targets of opportunity and if we can find a use for it, we'll take it of course. If we find something on the road that we can't use, perhaps we can work a trade with Prescott or even Sedona."

"That Arizona National Guard installation is up west of Flagstaff you know, Navajo Army Depot."

"We're set for now on beans and bullets Frank, we may go there later."

"Do you want to go north or south?"

"We'll go south until we get about 30 miles out of Phoenix, if we can, and then turn around and work our way north close to Flagstaff. We'd better take a few gallons of diesel fuel, some batteries and the generator with a battery charger. Phil, get the can of starting ether in case we need it."

"Are we just taking pistols or will we be carrying long arms too?"

"I think maybe we'd better take the long arms Frank. I don't think we'll need the Tac-50, but we should take the M1As. Can you drive a semi?"

"Never tried to drive a semi before John, but if I have to, I suppose I can learn."

"We'll let you drive the pickup if we find one or more semis to bring back. Phil, get those bolt cutters while you're at it. We might have to cut some locks off some trailers."

"Won't there be a cargo manifest?"

"Probably, but I wouldn't bank on it. Did you check your air filter?"

It Doesn't Get Any Better Than This - Chapter 3

"It had ash but I was able to tap it on the ground and clear most of it. I have a spare if you think I should change it."

"Take it with us, just in case."

In the patriot fiction story *Paradise*, Rick had found solar panels. If we could be only so lucky, we could solve our electrical problems once and for all time. It would take more than panels, however. We'd need inverters and batteries too.

"Why don't we take a clipboard and a hand full of paper? If we can't find the manifest, we can open the back and make a list on a blank sheet of paper. We can number the trucks, starting with S for the southbound lane and 1 for the first truck and so forth. We can do the same for the northbound trucks, starting with the first truck north of Phoenix. Once we get to the last truck before our exit, we can renumber them so all the numbers get larger the further south we go."

"And do the same with the trucks north of the exit we use?"

"Sure why not?"

"If you can keep it straight, it suits me just fine Phil."

"I hope we can find more solar panels Dad."

"Flagstaff has several solar outlets, fellas. We might try Northern Arizona Wind and Sun," Frank responded. "In fact, I think there are several solar outlets in Flagstaff and I doubt anyone nuked Flagstaff because it's too small."

"So do you want to go to Flagstaff first?"

"Nah, we'll get to it, eventually. Maybe there's still some stuff left in my store. I have bedding in every size made."

"Phil, instead of numbering the trucks, just indicate if they're on the North or South bound lane and the mile marker. I wonder how much ash we'll run into."

"We won't know until we go. Shake a leg; let's get this show on the road."

When Dad pulled out, he turned left and took 89 to Alt 89 and from there to Sedona and then on to Flagstaff. He only left Alt 89 when we got to the Airport, where he got on I-17. Since it was more than obvious where he was headed neither Frank nor I said a word. However, when he turned west and got off I-40 at Bellemont, we began to wonder why he'd changed his mind and gone to Navajo Army Depot. The gate was locked, as you'd expect. He just nudged the F-450 right through it. At least, he didn't scratch my paint.

"We're going to check every bunker they have here. I decided it was better we had the stuff than have it used against us."

"No way can we take much, Dad."

"We find a couple of those HEMTTs. They'll haul ten tons each. Think 20 tons of ordnance will be enough?"

"It should last for the next 3 or 4 wars."

"Make sure to leave room at the top for the solar panels, we'll go there next. Frank, you can drive the pickup and lead the way to the solar place."

Had we known, or had Frank said something, there was an APS solar project in Flagstaff that generated 95kw of DC and/or 82kw of AC power. It had 1,260 solar modules manufactured by Siemens and a 100,000kw inverter manufactured by Satcon. A project to take it apart for sure, but free electricity for forever, when the Sun was shining again.

By the time we had one truckload of ordnance we had more than we needed and kept the second HEMTT empty to haul stuff from Northern Arizona Wind and Sun. Can't say whether or not it was looting, there wasn't anyone around to ask if we could buy some. We filled the HEMTT with batteries and panels.

Do you have any idea how much a Crown 12-125-13 Industrial Fork Lift Battery 24 volt, 935 AH weights? About ³/₄ of a ton and we got 3. They're fork lift batteries and I'm sure of it because that's what their fork lift used. No sense in going halfway, Dad said. Besides, we loaded them first. Thank God they had a trailer to haul the fork lift; we were going to need it to unload them. By the time we were done packing the second truck and had the inverters and controllers in the box of the F-450, we had to squeeze the remaining panels in the ordnance truck.

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On out first outing, we didn't get anything on our priority list. I noted trucks on I-17 down to where we got off, by the Flagstaff airport (so there weren't any in those 2 miles). The good thing was that once we got up to speed, the wind blew the ash off the windshield. But it was thinning, a couple of times I could almost see a mile. We got back just in time to feed the livestock before dinner.

"What did you guys do today?"

"Nothing much, we went shopping."

"What did you get?"

"About 5 tons of ordnance, over 2 tons of batteries, a whole bunch of solar panels, inverters and charge controllers. Oh, and a fork lift."

"What did you a fork lift for?"

"Lifting the batteries. Heavy suckers, whadya think Dad, 1,500 pounds?"

"Close to it Phil."

"What kind of ordnance?"

"Just the usual stuff you see sitting around in the bunkers at an Army Depot. Concussion, fragmentation, smoke and incendiary grenades; M136 AT-4 rockets. Her highness and the prince. Lots of belted .50 and 7.62. A rather small amount of Mk211."

"If you don't want to tell me what you got, fine. Don't play word games with me Phillip."

"Fine, in English. At the solar place, we got 3 fork lift batteries, several inverters, charge controllers and solar panels. The batteries are very heavy and require a fork lift or crane to lift. We took their fork lift. At Navajo Army Deport, we got an assortment of hand grenades, anti-tank rockets, a .50 caliber and a .30 caliber machinegun. Mk211 is explosive .50 caliber ammo for Dad's rifle."

"Did you check the trucks on I-17?"

"We were only on I-17 for about two miles; from the junction of Alt 89 with I-17 at the airport until the I-40 junction. If we can get the solar up and running, we may be able to burn a lot less diesel."

"Are you going looking for food tomorrow?"

"I thought maybe we'd hang around here and install the new solar setup."

"Let me know when you're ready to go, I'll have a list."

"What kind of list? This won't be a go to the grocery store kind of trip Moira. We'll take what we find and be happy we found it. The only Costco nearby is the one in Prescott and we're not welcome."

"What about Phoenix? There are about a dozen there."

"They probably glow in the dark Moira. We see when we get there, but no promises."

Moira wasn't usually like this. I attributed her behavior to the fact she was pregnant and this was the first time she had been through a GTW. Hell, it was the first time any of us

had been through a GTW and you put a Supervolcano on top of that, you have some shindig.

"What we need to do," Dad said, "Is to stay at home, clean up what we can, get the solar installed and see what we can find out about the eruption. We don't know what erupted, except that it was big. The air still isn't clear so the ash hasn't all settled out. I figure it's going to get very, very cold. Thank your lucky stars that we're in Arizona instead of Minnesota. We'll be getting a lot of snow, probably fairly soon. When it melts, it will turn the ash to concrete. We have to clear off as much of the ash as we can. If we can figure out how to plow it into the soil, it will enrich the soil and the extra water from the snow should make for good growing conditions."

"But short growing seasons?"

"At first they will be, count on it. At least global warming won't be a problem anymore. We're going to need a lot of things that we don't have. We could use a larger tractor and an additional plow to turn the soil. We can pull the fences between Ashley's and my place and farm it as a continuous 2 section parcel with 1,265 arable acres. We're going to be short of hands to do the work, so maybe we can get some of the people from Prescott to work for us. We can pay room and board and some of the pre-65 silver coins."

"What about recovering the things from the trucks on I-17?"

"To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven. – Ecclesiastes, Chapter 3, Verse 1. We'll do it as we get to it. I sort of made up a list for us to talk about:

- 1. Install the solar
- 2. Clean up the ash
- 3. Find farm equipment
- 4. Plow the ash into the soil
- 5. Pull down the fences
- 6. Search I-17 for supplies"

"Add checking the Phoenix Costco's to the list."

"7. Check the Phoenix Costco stores. Anything else?"

"No? Okay, we'll split up our labor and the two of you can install solar panels while I mount the blade and move the ash around. Any idea how much they'll put out?"

"At the moment, we should get about $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{2}{3}$ of their rated power. Depending how we do it, we may be able to eliminate one generator. Anything we do to reduce our diesel usage is money in the bank."

"We aren't paying for the diesel."

"It's just an expression, for crying out loud. We got two pallet loads of the Sharp panels. They're two to the box, 30 boxes to the pallet. Sixty panels will give us over 13kw at full power and we have two pallets. Added to what we have now, we'll have close to 34kw."

"Before we do step 6, I want to go back to Northern Arizona Wind. We need all the panels we can get and I think Ashley and I will add some wind turbines to the mix. The wind usually blows even when the sun doesn't shine. All we'll have to do is get a synchronizer to synchronize the inverter outputs."

"If we're going back, we'd better do it now. That way we'll have everything we must have to meet our energy needs. Add a step 0, Dad to get more solar and wind equipment."

"We'll unload tomorrow and go back, if you want."

"Did you see any more pallets of the Sharp panels?"

"I did," Frank said. "I didn't notice the size they were, though. Will three batteries be enough or do we need the other three I saw."

"Where did you see those?"

"I saw them in the warehouse behind some other things."

"What do you think Dad, feed a 48 volt battery bank with the dc? Won't need a synchronizer if we do that."

"We might just as well get them while the getting is good. We can check around for farm equipment while we're at it."

The only John Deere dealer in Flagstaff was a Bobcat company and the only John Deere equipment they had was used, very used. There was a John Deere dealer in Prescott Valley and they weren't keeping us out, so maybe we could try there. We unloaded the next morning and drove the two HEMTTs and the F-450 back to Flagstaff going up on 89, the way we'd gone the previous day. Frank towed the trailer with the forklift with the Ford.

We loaded the 3 batteries on the truck and packed the space around them with anything that would fit, charge controllers, solar panels, inverters and even cable. The second truck was filled with wind equipment. We took one kind, the Skystream 1.8 Kilowatt 120 Volt Grid Tie Wind Generators with 30' Whisper Guyed Tower Kits. There were 30 of the wind generators and tower kits. Each of us would get 18kw of wind energy but it couldn't be stored in a battery except by using it to charge the battery. I guess you could say that we had backup batteries.

You know about PIE, right? P=IE or watts equals RMS amps times RMS volts. RMS means root mean square and that's why a generator has a higher Kva rating than Kw rating. A 1.8kw generator at 120 volts puts out 15 amps and ten of them put out 120 volts at 150 amps. And, all you have to do is synchronize the phase on the single phase generators. That is, if they are operating at peak and from what I've heard, the wind turbine manufacturers are optimistic about their ratings. The Skystream unit's outputs were guaranteed minimum outputs.

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It took more than a month of steady hard work to clear the ash around the farms, install the solar and raise the wind towers. Dad had to help on the last phase of the wind project, 2 pairs of hands weren't enough. Ashley and Shelia took Moira to Prescott to see that doctor on a regular basis. By now, the visibility had increased to about 1½ miles. We still had small accumulations of ash around the buildings, but not enough to worry about.

When we went to Prescott Valley, the John Deere dealer was open. He didn't have any business, but was nevertheless open. What we needed were two tractors and 2 5bottom plows with three point hitches. We could also use a second 24' tandem disk, used. Dad dickered with the dealer for half a day, but came away satisfied. Two used 8010 tractors, two used 5-bottom (18") plows and one used 24' tandem disk. The dealer would deliver but wait to unload until he had the gold in his hand.

With our electric needs satisfied and the farm equipment on hand, Dad and I began turning the soil while Frank stayed by the home place doing chores and part time guard duty. We made the first pass through the fields with the plows and then did the same with the disk. We then made a second plow pass going cross grain from the first plowing and again disking. That was it because it started to snow. It snowed for 40 days and nights and just kept on snowing. Canada didn't get this much snow in a bad year.

Then, Moira went into labor and the roads were 10' deep with snow. Ashley and Sheila delivered the baby. We didn't name her after Thai rice, settling instead on Grace. We made it through the war and the eruption solely through the grace of God and Dad's planning, so it seemed appropriate. We had dug a path through the snow to the barn and one to Frank and Sheila's singlewide. The snow was stacked so high, it was very difficult to toss the new snow up to the top of the banks.

"Well, we have 1,265 acres we can plant. Let's keep 5 acres for a garden and divide the rest. What should we grow and where do we get the seed?"

"We're going to need diesel for a long time to come. Why not produce canola oil and convert it to biodiesel. It's the canola plant and you get 127 gallons of oil per acre and about 100 gallons of biodiesel."

"The most we could hope for is 126,000 gallons of biodiesel from the whole ranch?"

"That's about the size of it."

"How about we plant wheat, corn, oats and canola in equal quantities?"

"We have to use some of that acreage for hay for the livestock."

"We can discuss this all day, but it still comes down to where do we find seed and what kinds can we get?"

"I'm all for going to California to the San Joaquin Valley and seeing what we can find. They grow about every crop known in that area and if anyone had seed stocks, it should be them."

"Now you're thinking. I like it, let's do it."

"It's going to be a while, I'm afraid, unless you plan to ski there."

There was, for the moment, nothing else we could do. This was without doubt the worst catastrophe in the history of the world and nothing had probably happen on this scale since the asteroid killed off the dinosaurs 65.5 ± 0.3 million years before. If one could project from our experience, billions of people had died or would die before this was over. This might just create another bottleneck in human civilization. The eruption of the Toba Supervolcano 70,000 to 75,000 years ago reduced the average global temperature by 5 degrees Celsius for several years and may have triggered an ice age. It has been postulated that this created a bottleneck in human evolution. A much smaller but similar effect occurred after the eruption of Krakatoa in 1883, when global temperatures fell for about 5 years in a row.

The snow had the effect of washing the volcanic ash out of the air with the water crystallizing around the ash particles. While not all snow forms on dust in the air, it can and will. Our next big event would be the spring melt off. If it melted slowly, the soil was capable of absorbing all of the water. If it melted quickly, it would run off in a flood and take some of our soil with it. Most of the Mississippi Delta was formed from soil from states bordering the Missouri, Ohio and Mississippi Rivers.

Our soil, before the ash, consisted mainly of sand and clay, basically adobe. The adobe they use to build homes is roughly half sand (50%), one-third clay (35%), and one-sixth straw (15%). Over a long period, the ash in the soil would enrich it drastically. Some of the most fertile soil in the world was found in Hawaii and that's all made from ash. We had high hopes that we could find the seeds we needed to plant all of the land and the full 5 acre garden. Garden seeds weren't a problem except that we didn't have enough to plant 5 acres. If we harvested a significant amount of seed the first year, that wouldn't be a problem after.

What range grass there had been on the soil had been plowed under along with the ash and would make an organic fertilizer, but not that much. There was more grass here than southern Arizona, which was almost totally desert. That was because we were north of the Mogollon Rim, the geographical structure that ran from our county (Yavapai) to Show Low and beyond.

That 9' Indian that one author talks about? He'd need a step stool to see over the snow bank. We almost needed one to get the snow out of the paths we'd cut. You don't see a lot of snow blowers in Arizona. Most snow blowers don't blow the snow high enough to clear the snow pile, so it didn't really matter. The snow settled due to sunlight as more and more smoke and ash were cleared from the air. When it first falls, snow can be between 5% and 15% water. As it settles, that percentage increases up to about 30%. When the spring thaw comes, the snow is as much as 50% water and unless it melts slowly, you get the runoff I mentioned.

We muddled along, day by day, clearing snowfall as we got it and tending to the livestock. By April the snow had settled enough that we used Ashley's old tractor, loader and blade and were able to clear around the buildings. We worked our way down to Dad and Ashley's and cleaned their yard after that. When we checked, there wasn't a whole lot of snow on 89 and Dad suggested we try to go to California. If we could get to I-40, we could get to the San Joaquin Valley via CA 58 to CA 99 and then north.

"How far up the Big Valley are we going?"

"Not one mile further than it takes to get what we want."

"If you don't know, why don't you just say so?"

"I don't know."

I'd asked two questions and he'd answered one sort of roundabout and said I don't know the second time. Was his second response to my first question or second? But, he was right, we'd go just as far as it would take and no farther. It takes a lot of seed to plant 1,260 acres and we couldn't do this every year. We needed an heirloom seed for each crop we intended to grow. A person got those from companies that produced seed, like Pioneer Hi-bred. Now owned by DuPont, Pioneer sells seed corn as well as hybrids or improved varieties of sorghum, sunflower, soybean, alfalfa, canola, rice and wheat, as well as forage and grain additives.

The only way to haul that much seed was to take the two HEMTTs and a fuel trailer. The trucks only had a range of 300 miles. We would probably need full tanks, a tank trailer carrying around 1,000-gallons and the portable generator, Frank's China diesel. Maybe we could find a military trailer to pull behind one of the trucks and increase the load. It wouldn't mean a second trip, just a stop at Navajo Army Depot. The XM1095 MTV Trailer (MTVT) is designed to be towed by the MTV family of vehicles. The M1095 is a dual axle trailer with a gross payload capacity of 10,000 pounds. The trailer is equipped with an air brake system actuated by the prime mover and a parking brake system to prevent movement of the trailer when not connected to the prime mover. A canvas and bows kit is provided to protect the cargo from the elements. So we towed it with a HEMTT, big deal. We now had 25 tons of hauling capacity, almost a semi-tractor trailer rig, not counting full tanks and 1,000-gallons of stabilized diesel.

We entered California and for the first time since the Grapes of Wrath, they didn't have the inspection stations manned. Frank asked, "Where's the beef?" Right, only a state like California would man its borders after WW III and a Supervolcano. Strange thing was the ash seemed to be deeper here. The snow was about the same, but I'll swear the ash was double or triple as thick if not more. We saw steam or smoke from chimneys but never any people.

The first big city we hit was Bakersfield and we found the yellow pages and went shopping. We didn't find much, some cotton seed and vegetable seeds. All were some type of hybrid. We continued north on 99 until we got to Fresno. Here, we got lucky. We found several seed dealers and some had heirloom seeds or improved varieties. We took all we found and added hybrid seeds. It didn't much matter on alfalfa and we could use the hybrids for the bulk of our livestock feed and grow the heirloom seed to multiply our supply.

We loaded up, topped off and headed back, planning on putting up somewhere along the way. We got as far as Barstow and found an empty motel. It had cold running water and the toilets flushed, but there were no other amenities. We took a pair of adjoining rooms, each with a pair of adjoining queen beds, ate an MRE and went to bed.

We were up bright and early the next morning and fixed a Mountain House breakfast and heated a pot of coffee. We got on I-40 and about as far east as the Daggett exit. To our left sat MCLB, Barstow. For all intents and purposes, it was as deserted as the old Calico Ghost Town, a few miles north on I-15. The gates were locked but we were driving a HEMTT and they might as well have not been there.

We entered the base and found the main headquarters where the records were kept. That took a pry bar, not the HEMTT. We ran down the list and marked a few items, 3 M-40s, several cases of M118LR, crates of LAW rockets and some M61 fragmentation grenades leftover from Vietnam; plus, 2 each Mk 15 rifles and 100 cans of Mk211MP. We also found some good M14 semi-auto rifles. It only took an hour and we were east bound and down, going wide open at around 54-55 mph, less on uphill stretches. (Jerry Reed died on 9/2/08)

We had made out like bandits, even paying for some of the seed. No one had given the MCLB a second thought on the west bound trip, but on the return trip, it was visible for a long time and we had taken only a little, but the little we took was far above any expectations we had when we took the off ramp. Just outside of Needles, we stopped and refueled the trucks because the fuel gauges were on the empty pegs. It wasn't that far from home so we had a bite to eat before moving on.

As most of you probably know, California isn't the only state with inspection stations on its border; Arizona has them on its western border too. The roads are coned off and you have to slow down to go through the station and low and behold, a man stepped out and raised his hand. We should have just run over him, but being the good citizens that we were, we stopped.

"Do you have any fruits or vegetables?"

"No sir."

"What do you have on the trucks?"

"Mostly seeds."

"Hold on, let me look."

"What the hell? Arizona is operating their inspection stations?"

"I don't know Phil, maybe we should get your Dad up from the other truck."

"You're right nothing but seeds. The road use tax is 50% of your cargo."

"The hell you say."

The man waived his left arm and several men started out of the inspection station offices, about 100' away. I pulled my P-14 and put down that waiving SOB. Both Frank and I bailed out the driver's door and Dad did the same. The three of us opened up on them with the shotguns sending load after load of buckshot at them. That 12 pellet has a fair amount of recoil, but at this range, it's deadly. It was over in the blink of an eye and only two of them got off a single shot.

"Phil, I'm hit."

I rushed to Dad and Frank stood where he was, slowly feeding more shells into his shotgun.

"Where are you hit?"

"Right shoulder. It tore something up, maybe my collar bone."

"I'm going to have to get that jacket off before I can do anything Dad."

It Doesn't Get Any Better Than This – Chapter 4

"Just do it!"

We slipped jacket off his left arm and down his right arm.

"Damn, that hurts."

"You're bleeding too."

"I should be. I just got shot. Use your knife and cut my shirts so you can see the wound. Only cut the shirt, not me."

I open my Case pocket knife and sliced through his flannel shirt and his undershirt. His clavicle was obviously broken and he was leaking blood, but it wasn't spurting. I moved to the back and cut open his shirts there because his shirt was bloody there, too.

"The good news is that it doesn't appear they hit any arteries or major veins. The bad news is that your collar bone is broken for sure. I'll slap on the ACS on the entrance and exit wounds, add some gauze pads for pressure and tape it up. What do we have for pain?"

I heard a shotgun blast and looked up. Frank was checking the attackers and blowing the heads off any survivors. He started collecting weapons and added the rifles, shotguns, handguns, magazines and ammo to the trailer we were towing. He checked inside and came out with more ammo, so I went to help.

"How's your Dad?"

"Shot in the right shoulder, broken collar bone. No major blood vessel damage. You once said you had something of everything in the way of meds, what do you have for pain?"

"My doctor friend prescribed morphine in vials plus some of those military Syrettes. A standard part of a medic's equipment, the morphine Syrette consisted of a small tube of morphine with an attached hypodermic needle. The morphine was administered by piercing the patient's skin with the needle (after a seal was broken with a small needle) and then squeezing the tube. The Syrette itself was developed and trademarked by Squibb (currently the Bristol-Myers Squibb Company).

"Although the injection of morphine straight into the bloodstream is more addicting than any other means (such as smoking or ingesting opium, from which morphine is derived), morphine has been widely used since the American Civil War as a quick means to ease the pain of injured soldiers in the field. "In an effort to prevent overdosing and possible addiction, World War II medics were instructed to attach the used Syrette to the patient's collar in order to prevent additional morphine being administered during later stages of treatment. Usually the ½ grain injection from the toothpaste tube shaped Syrette, combined with physical exhaustion, was sufficient to knock the patient out, with the casualty often waking up in the hospital."

"They still make those?"

"They must, I don't think a pharmacy would sell 65 year old drugs."

"We have a ways to go, do you think he will be okay?"

"I'll drive the lead truck and we'll move your Dad to the passenger side of the second truck and you can drive it. Do you know the signs of shock?"

"Anxiety, restlessness, hypotension, a rapid, weak, thready pulse, cool, clammy skin, rapid and shallow respirations, hypothermia, thirst and dry mouth, fatigue, cold and mottled skin and distracted look in the eyes or staring into space."

"Not bad. Do you know how to start an IV?"

"EMT Basic, yes I can start one."

"Let me get a liter of normal saline and an IV set. That should help with the shock."

Frank was gone for a few minutes and returned with a bag and an IV set.

"Sorry, I didn't pack saline, but I have Ringers. It should work until we can get him to a hospital. Set the rate roughly equivalent to his rate of blood loss, say 30 drips to start off."

"Where are we going to stop?"

"That depends on how well he's doing. If he isn't holding his own, we'll stop at Williams or Flagstaff. Otherwise, I say we try to get home. Prescott Valley has some of the better medical treatment, or so I hear."

We pushed the vehicles as fast as we could, averaging around 55mph, even with the loads. I checked on Dad in Williams and he was unchanged. We pushed on to Flagstaff and if anything the fluid replacement was helping. Some of his symptoms were improved. So we decided to go home and then take him to Prescott or Prescott Valley.

When we finally arrived home, we moved Dad to the back seat of the Ford, and Ashley and I took him to the Prescott Valley hospital. They went to work on him right away and brought in a surgeon to repair his collar bone. Once he was out of recovery, the doctor said he'd have to stay at least two nights, until he stabilized. He said in this day and age, those blood clotting bandage made a lot of difference and while he didn't recommend transporting a patient the distance we had, Dad hadn't suffered because of it. I left Ashley at the hospital and headed home to help Frank unload.

He had all of the ordnance unloaded and put up and about half the grain seeds. We finished unloading the truck and I went to the house to fill Moira in, only to learn that Frank already had.

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The morphine and the wound had worked to make Dad semi-conscious and I don't believe he suffered much on the way from the border to the hospital. We saw no sign of people or a hospital in Williams or Flagstaff. Both communities had hospitals, sure, but they seemed to be unstaffed. The doctor said he'd had to use a stainless steel collar and pins to repair the clavicle and Dad might suffer a minor impairment from that point on. It would take him at least 2 months to heal to the point where he could be fully active.

We put an ad up on several bulletin boards in Prescott Valley, offering work for men or women to work as farm laborers. We offered room, board and food or pre-65 silver for pay. If we got enough help, we could expand the garden and make better use of the 5 acres we set aside. We posted a second ad offering one pre-65 dime per Mason jar. That was an extremely high price, but we figured it would take that much to get people to part with their jars. With two large canners and the older canner that we found a ring for, we could can quarts in the larger canners and pints in the Presto.

This assumed, of course, that the weather would permit growing any kind of crop. We decided to plant 6 different plants and divided the combined fields accordingly into 210 acre fields. We planned to make one pass with the cultivator for the old tractor and trash farm after that. It was going to be a major challenge to do that much, even with help. We were able to hire 3 men and two women and they got together and said they'd rather commute to work and receive additional compensation in the form of food or silver (our choice).

We told them we could do the silver, but with Dad laid up, we actually could use one more man to work the fields and if he happened to be a carpenter, all the better. We needed more storage for the harvest we hoped to get. Plus, if anyone knew where we could find an oil press and biodiesel equipment, we'd pay a finder's fee.

Our offer would accomplish two things, get us the equipment we needed and put a little extra money in circulation in the form of silver. We would accept gold, silver, or barter and the barter could be in the form of labor, another bright idea we picked up off one of the forums.

It warmed slowly and the snow didn't melt off in a rush, providing us with ample water. At least, we had more than enough subsoil moisture to allow the plants to germinate and get well along in their growth before water became a problem. Southern Arizona classifies as a desert because it receives average annual precipitation of below 10".

Northern Arizona does better, with our area receiving a historical average annual precipitation of 19.32 inches and average snowfall of 25.4 inches. However, according to everything we'd read, a nuclear/volcanic winter was followed by a hot, dry summer. A couple of good rains should be enough; at least, that's what we hoped.

We had decided on corn, oats, wheat, canola, great northern and pinto beans. We were also seeding alfalfa for hay. The last guy we picked up wasn't a farmhand but a welder. It didn't matter; all he needed to be able to do was drive a tractor or a team of horses pulling a wagon. Dad thought we should go back to the dealer in Prescott Valley and see about two small utility tractors to pull the wagons. Frank and I told him that that was up to him and Ashley.

When the fields were dry enough we got out and planted, completing the task in a bit over a week. Next, we turned to building storage for the various crops. That's why we wanted, and got, a carpenter as a member of our crew. Ashley's old corn picker was a two row mounted picker and you got ear corn that could be stored in an open corn crib. Above the corn crib we built two large storage spaces, one for pintos and one for great northern.

A second building was slapped together to hold the wheat, oats and canola. Our welder, Chad, ended up with the finder's fee when he directed us to an unoccupied farm with an oil press and 500-gallon per day biodiesel operation. Ten percent of what we paid was nothing so Dad gave him \$100 face value silver coins, an assortment of halves, quarters and dimes. There was some minor fabrication involved when we moved the oil press. The agreed upon pay was \$3 a day in face value pre-65 silver. It may not seem like much, but gold and silver were making a major comeback and \$66 a month was a lot of money.

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Our first spot of trouble at the ranch came one day while we were working on the storage building for the wheat etc. A low rider car passed by the ranch slowly, taking note of the activity. We were putting up the buildings at Dad's because of its central location. Upon hiring, we issued M16A2s to the new employees and made sure they were proficient; those that weren't practiced on our dime until they were. All four men were veterans, one of our hiring criteria. I learned quite a bit from them, especially those who'd seen combat.

They didn't carry the rifles while they were working, but they were close at hand. Each man and the two women had 10 30-round magazines of M855; plus, the men were issued 2 M61s. We had a heads up from our place, Moira was watching the road. Other than checking the location of our equipment we continued to work on the building.

One of the men, Jeremy, had been a member of the Arizona National Guard in times past and he asked why we didn't get some of the Claymore mines the Guard had. We didn't have a good answer except to say that we hadn't seen them and knew very little about using them. Apparently Jeremy and Chad went up to the Depot over the weekend. The following Monday, they showed up at work with the back of their mega cab pickup full of the M7 bandoleers. Dad said it was strange, but they didn't appear to be English. Huh?

"They have a 5 ton dump of Claymores. We couldn't get them all, but I think we may go back next weekend and get more."

"Take one of the HEMTTs. Will that give you the space to get what you want?"

"We may need both, a 5 ton dump contains over 1,780 Claymores."

"There is also that 5 ton trailer we got from the Depot, will that be enough?"

"And then some. We'll get Bob and Sam to go with us in the second truck. Do you have any place to store five tons of Claymore mines?"

"We may have to build something. I suppose it should be concrete, what do you think?"

"That might be a good idea. We have to keep our eyes open for those low riders. They probably won't be back until harvest time, I think they were just scouting. Word got out about your trip to California to get seed because John got shot. Even low riders know that you have to grow the seed before you can eat the produce."

"You may not know it Chad, but we have quite an assortment of quality sniper rifles. We have 3 Tac-50, a scoped model 700, and several M1As."

"What do you have for handguns, M9s or M1911s?"

"We actually have several P-14s and one M1911. Each adult has a 7.62×51mm rifle, 12-gauge shotgun and .45 semi-auto pistol of some description."

What did you use at the confrontation you had at the border station?"

"They were within 100' so we used the shotguns with the 12-pellet 00 buck. Kicks like a mother, but it sure got the job done."

"What size of pattern?"

"I didn't look; I was too busy helping Dad. Ask Frank, he checked them over and finished what they started."

"Use his .45?"

"No, he shot them in the head with his Mossberg."

"Jeez. Remind me not to piss him off."

When we had the second storage completed, we built forms to pour concrete walls for a munitions bunker up at my place. Since there wasn't a lot of ready mix available, we formed up 6" thick walls and planned to add soil. It only took a day to build the forms and a second to pour. They took the HEMTTs and the trailer the next weekend and cleaned out the M18A1 dump.

Dad and Ashley made a trip to Prescott Valley and got two used utility tractors and more wagons. A local store owner had been persuaded to be our go between on the used jars and he said he had so many he was running out of space. We sent the trucks to town to get the jars. We had, give or take, over 1,000 quarts and pints, mostly quarts. We also had him ask if they had spare lids and offered a silver dime per box. He had about 60 dozen lids.

With building done, we had Bob and Sam help the ladies in the garden. They picked and hoed. The first crop to come in was the salad stuff followed by green beans and pickle sized cucumbers. The ladies we busting their bottoms, processing and canning 8 batches (4×2) of quarts and 4 batches of pints a day. A 16 quart Presto canner will process 10 pints per batch while a 23 quart will process 20 pints per batch if you stack the jars. We also used the rack we'd gotten from Presto years before. Their maximum output was 112 quarts and 80 pints per day. They would go through our truckload of jars and the used jars in no time.

Chad was assigned to piling the soil on our new bunker and Jeremy was sent out to cultivate. Every Friday afternoon, the men were on the firing range with us, polishing their skills and sharing them with us. The ladies usually finished up early enough that they could spend at least an hour on the range.

Moira had given us two girls and I really wanted a son. We discussed it. She was leery about bringing another child into the world we now lived in. I understood, but I wanted a son to carry on the family name. We didn't argue over it, but it would be her decision, she was the one taking the pill. So far, she was still taking it.

I went to check on Dad and see if he was healed or still healing. "Why didn't you duck?"

"I didn't see anyone pointing a gun at me until I got hit."

"Tell me something, if you have an answer. You bought M1As for yourself and for Moira and me. When you married Ashley, you got her the same rifle. What's so special about the M1A?"

"Anything good enough for the SEALs is good enough for us. Other military units use the M14 as a sniper rifle or DMR. The SEALs use it as their standard arm along with a .45acp."

"How do you know that?"

"I saw a TV show on Military or History Channel."

"Did you notice when it was produced?"

"Yes, 1999."

"I'm sure they went to better guns, Dad."

"Maybe so; doesn't matter, if they were good enough for the SEALS in 1999, they're plenty good for us a dozen years later."

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The folks in Prescott hadn't been that friendly while the folks in Prescott Valley were easy to get along with. Consequently, with summer past, and when it was time to sell or trade off what we had grown, Prescott Valley got first nod. Moira had taken the early crops from the garden that we couldn't eat, mostly salad components, to the Farmer's Market they had. She traded it for jars, lids, ammo and pre-65 silver coins. Once canning was in full swing, they were canning 7 days per week and going through jars like nobody's business.

We sold both whole wheat and whole wheat flour. We sold pinto and great northern beans. We also sold oats and rolled oats. The canola was crushed, the oil removed and converted to biodiesel, first topping off our tanks and then the diesel tankers and the dried pulp fed to the livestock. We expected to produce about 21,000-gallons of biodiesel. Some corn was ground and sold as corn meal, some converted to anhydrous ethanol and the remainder mixed with last year's remaining soybeans and cracked for livestock feed.

It seemed obvious that we'd need to turn the soil more than we had to get maximum production, so we plowed and disked in the fall and intended to do it once more come spring. We were now at our most vulnerable, we had food and fuel and not everyone else did. Our activities hadn't gone unnoticed by Prescott. Those low riders made an occasional pass, but not as slowly as they had the first time. We assumed they were checking on our progress.

We had 6" of snow on the ground on Labor Day. It was more of a nuisance than a problem. We had acquired four good used ATV's and four snowmobiles that we could use for roving patrols, should we decide it was necessary. Our hired hands had worked to make sure all was done before we paid them off in their share of the food. Each had enough for their family and perhaps a little extra. Some chose to take at least one month's wages in silver coins to get things we didn't supply. We did let them keep the weapons they carried throughout the summer. The only use we had for M16s was when we would need high volumes of suppressing fire. We had M16A3s for that.

We had spent the first summer cleaning up after the disaster and the second growing as much as we could. We actually got pretty good yields, all things considered, like the short growing season. Our four male hired hands suggested that they should move to the ranch and lend a hand with security and whatever else we needed done. We told them they were welcome, but we didn't have living space for them. We could probably provide limited power and definitely sewer and water. They would need their own trailers, propane tanks and standby generators.

They came up with 4 1,100-gallon propane tanks, 4 homes, 4 5,000-gallon diesel tanks and 4 QD 12500 Cummins generators. This generator, the same one Ashley had for her place, was head and shoulders above the ones we had. When it was cranking out 100 amps, it was only using 1.2gph of diesel per hour. Our GDBB used 2.7gph at full power and the DGBC use 2.9gph at full power. By God, we were going to have to find some of those to replace what we had!

"Where did you find the generators?"

"Is it important, I'd rather not say?"

"Let's put it this way, can you get three more?"

"Sure, why?"

"They use less than half the fuel our diesel generators use."

"Do you have large tanks?"

"If we had those generators, we could run them 24/7 for 3 years on our fuel supply. Frank's tank is smaller, but it would last a year. Since you're moving here, how about some serious rifles to go along with those poodle shooters?"

"What did you have in mind?"

"If you wanted to be snipers, we have 3 Tac-50s and 3 M-40 bolt action rifles. We all carry the M1As, as you well know. We don't have any extra but we did pick up a few semi-auto M14s when we made a stop in California. You have the ARs we gave you, but they aren't that much of a weapon and get dirty easily."

"I saw you with M16s, didn't I?"

"Yes Chad, you did. They're A3s so we have some full auto capacity if we need suppressing fire. However, our weapons of choice are the M1A, the Mossberg 590A1 and P-14 .45s."

"You want them to stay down, right?"

"You're damned right we do; no sense in having to shoot them twice."

"Just exactly who are you worried about, those low riders?"

"Yeah, sure wish we knew more about them."

"I checked around. They're from Prescott. I didn't get any names but I did learn there is a group of people there that's suspected of major looting."

"Not salvage?"

"Hell no, salvage is recovering abandoned property. Looting is taking from those that have it and often leaving them dead."

"How big a group is it?"

"Didn't get any exact numbers, but I heard anywhere from 15 to 40."

"Let's get your homes moved in and leveled. Then we can see what good we can get out of those Claymores."

"I have an idea about that, but it will keep."

"I have time, what's your idea?"

"Wire them all together in a panel with toggle switches; one switch per mine. We turn on the switches for the mine(s) we want to blow and then switch on the power to the panel. You can blow anywhere from one to all of them. We could put them in a pattern around the building on this plot and your Dad's buildings. I figure we should put two trailers here and the other two at your Dad's place."

"I'd prefer it if you and Jeremy would locate here."

"We planned to. We were almost afraid to ask. We like your Dad and Ashley, but he gets along better with Sam and Bob. I suppose it's because they're closer to his age, while Jeremy and I are closer to your age."

"Let me show you where to hook into the water and septic. It's an oversized septic tank, so it should handle all of the sewage. I have some of that stuff we can add periodically to keep the bacteria going."

"What do you use?"

"Rid-X, once a month keeps the honey bucket away."

"Shouldn't that be an apple a day keeps the doctor away?"

"Maybe, but we don't have any fruit trees."

"No, but you have a greenhouse. I'll ask my wife Sharon to start some of the seed."

"You have apple seeds?"

"Yes, plus pears, plums and peaches. They're dwarf or semi-dwarf varieties and should take only a few years to produce fruit."

Chad went on to explain to me what he knew about dwarf and semi-dwarf trees. The fruit was the same size as a regular tree, but there was less of it. If we planted two of each variety, we'd have enough fruit for our own use. Anyone else who wanted fruit could grow their own, but Sharon and he would provide seed. He also said that Jeremy's wife, Norma was an excellent gardener and if we used the four wives they brought with them, we wouldn't need to hire the same two ladies from Prescott Valley the following year.

Once all four families were moved in and settled, we returned to Northern Arizona Wind and Sun and cleaned out the remaining solar and wind equipment, allowing us to provide them with a primary power source backed up by their generators. There were no more of the same batteries, but there were the next smaller model, the Crown 6-125-15 Industrial Fork Lift Battery 24 volt, 1,090 AH. We got 8 of those and they were lighter, weighing only 850 pounds. We also took the last 120v wind turbines and associated equipment.

It was cold and windy as we hurried to get the PV panels and the wind turbines installed and we were working on the last of them when a major snow storm blew in. At least we had help keeping an aisle clear between the trailers, our house and the barn. During early October while we were returning to the main house after doing chores, we heard some kind of vehicle running out back across one of Dad and Ashley's fields. We returned to the barn and looked out of the hayloft to find the source of the noise. It was a Sno-Cat pulling an open trailer holding about 25 guys, all armed to the teeth.

"I guess we'll get a change to try out the Tac-50 rifles after all. Chad, Jeremy and you get them from the shelter; Moira will show you where they are. Half of the magazines are loaded with A-MAX and the other half with Mk211. We can back you up with our M1As."

It Doesn't Get Any Better Than This – Chapter 5

They we about five hundred yards away, within the range of every rifle we had except for the M16s. They were moving slowly and when Jeremy and Chad got back and setup, we let them have it. The first shot disabled the Sno-Cat, essentially stranding them in place. The Sno-Cat provided them with cover from the 7.62 rifles but not the .50 caliber rifles. Frank and I kept their heads down and Jeremy and Chad did the rest. Finally, the few remaining survivors waived a white flag.

"Now what?"

"I won't be a party to shooting them in cold blood. Maybe we can use them as an object lesson."

"What do you have in mind?"

"Disarm them, explain that if they come back we'll kill them no questions asked and send them on their way shanks mare."

"That's a pretty long walk to Prescott."

"They should have thought about that before they attempted to do what they were doing."

"What about the wounded?"

"They can take them with them."

"Fine, I don't care one way or the other as long Frank agrees with you."

"Frank?"

"I'd just as shoot them where they stand, but we'll try it your way."

Just then the odds changed as Bob, Sam and Dad showed up. The odds were almost even at that point. By the time we got down from the hay loft and on scene, the survivors had been disarmed and were sitting in a snow pile.

"Eleven dead, 6 seriously wounded and 10 without a scratch. What are you going to do with them?"

"You collected their weapons, right?"

"Right."

"Okay, listen up, I won't repeat myself. You 10 uninjured men will help the six wounded men back to wherever you came from. We'll keep your weapons and ammo and any other weapons you had. You have two choices, leave and never come back, or stay here and face a firing squad. Do I make myself clear?"

We didn't get any looks that said they were happy with the choices, but they stood and struggled to help their wounded comrades back the way they had come. Our spoils of war included 2 HK91s, 2 HK93s, several AR15s, 9mm pistols including 2 Browning Hi-Powers and some imported stuff, Taurus and CZ mostly. The pistols were either 9mm or .45acp and the rifles 7.62×51mm or 5.56×45mm NATO. Only one pistol caught my eye, an H&K USP Tactical with a silencer. I took that one to use on special occasions.

A person couldn't fault their choice in weapons, The H & K firearms and the Browning's were quality weapons; the Taurus' and CZs a close second. We could trade off the AR15s and get them back the next time they were used against us. Since the count Chad had was from 15 to 40, we didn't know if this was all of them or simply a large raiding party.

This group had been the low riders we'd been concerned about. They were the first, but not the last. A month later, the sentry we now maintained in the barn spotted a second, larger group, again approaching from the rear and walking or riding skis. Moira contacted Dad, Sam and Bob after making certain they didn't have a similar group behind their homestead and they drove down the snow packed road arriving about 8-10 minutes later.

"What do you have?"

"More of the same, except they're on foot or using skis. We make it close to 40 of them. I recognize one or two of them and they're from Prescott. We cut holes in both ends of the hay loft so we can shoot at them without exposing ourselves. I don't suppose you brought your .50 cal?"

"Of course I did. Alright let's make them honest, on my mark..."

"Fire!"

With no Sno-Cat to hide behind, this group had no cover and it was like shooting fish in a barrel. When someone finally tied a white handkerchief on their rifle and raised it, we shot him where he stood. No quarter (El Degüello) was the order of the day. If it was good enough for John Wayne, it was good enough for us. We tried very hard to avoid hitting their weapons; they would be excellent trade goods.

When the last man fell, we climbed down from the loft and approached them carefully. Any survivors had their throat slit, because the correct translation of El Degüello is slitthroat. We gathered the weapons and ammo and then went for a tractor and wagon to haul the bodies back to the Prescott area. We dropped them just outside of town where we were sure they'd be found. We left a one page message: We will give no quarter if we are attacked. Don't come back, you are not welcome! The message was left unsigned.

"How did we make out on firearms and ammo this time?"

"We got some SKS, some AKs, 3 M1A Super Match rifles, Ruger Mini-14s, some hunting rifles – mostly .30-30s and .30-06. A Remington SWS 24, assorted pistols mostly .45s and even some cowboy guns, a Winchester Legacy 24" barreled .45 Colt with a matching Colt SAA with a 7½ barrel. See anything you want?"

"What kind of condition are those cowboy guns in?"

"Pretty much like new."

"Fine, I'll take those. They'll go well with my model 92 and SAA .44-40."

"You want the leather?"

"What did he have?"

"I think it's called the Laredoan. Has a cross draw holster for a $4\frac{3}{4}$ " revolver, but we couldn't find the revolver."

"Show me where you recovered it."

"It's right over here."

I spent 15 minutes going over the snow nearly inch by inch before I found the revolver. Maybe I'd get to play cowboy and Indians yet. I didn't have much .44-40 and only the ammo in the attacker's gun belt in .45 Colt. I cleaned my new weapons and oiled them well to prevent them rusting. I dug out some gold and silver and two cases of the 7.62×51mm surplus and then headed for Prescott Valley.

"Help you?"

"I'm looking for some ammunition."

"Yeah, isn't everyone? What caliber and how many rounds?"

".45 Colt, preferable full power rounds, but I'll take cowboy if that's all you have."

"Buck twenty-five a round unless you have something to trade."

"I have 2,000-rounds of 7.62×51mm."

"I have 1,000-rounds of cowboy and 1,000-rounds of Silver Tip."

"So how much extra cash will I get back?"

"You meant, how much extra cash would you owe, didn't you?"

"I said what I meant and I meant what I said."

"I don't know if I can do that."

"Okay, how many rounds of 7.62×51mm NATO do you have on hand?"

"None."

"And, how long have you had the .45 Colt?"

"Well before the war, that's for sure."

"It's a seller's market; you can get a good price for the NATO ammo. I'm willing to trade even up."

"Well go get it and let me have a look at it."

"Give me a hand; it weighs 60-pounds per case."

It came from Ammoman and on his website; he'd described it as near match grade. It came 5 battle packs of 200 rounds each per case. Dad had paid \$2,600 per 5 case lot, including shipping. The ammo was relatively new, 2003-04 production. I wouldn't be out that much; we'd picked up more rounds of the M118LR than I was trading off.

"Okay, deal. I'll get a two wheeler and we'll haul the ammo to your Ford."

Again, the guns and ammo were primarily for recreational shooting but they could kill you just as dead as more modern arms. All four of my saddles had a rifle scabbard attached, although they were seldom used. The scabbards were intended for the lever action rifles, but could hold a shotgun. They would also hold a M1A, but only with the 5 round magazine.

By now, it was getting too cold to ride and the horses had their long winter coats. The guns were, nonetheless, real conversation pieces. At one time or another, I got called Tom Mix, William S. Hart, Hopalong Cassidy, Gene Autry and Roy Rogers. We took the opportunity to build cupolas for the roof of the barns, to use as observation posts. Two attacks in as many months set us on edge. However, it appeared that they got the message, at least for now.

After a warm very dry summer, the rain we should have gotten finally came in the form of snow. Not as much as previous years, but enough to build the subsoil moisture if it melted slowly again. We were learning what it meant to be grain farmers. You need warm ground and subsoil moisture in the spring, rain during the growing season and enough time for the plants to mature. We were using 88-day corn which was close if not the shortest period corn. However, we'd had a good year and Dad was discussing planting two crops instead of six. He wanted to plant two crops one year, a second pair the second year and a third pair the third year and then start over.

"I can see advantages and disadvantages. It will mean we have to ration our stores over a three year period, Dad."

"Initially only two crops, two more will be rationed over two years and whatever we plant first only over a single year. Once we've initiated the program the 3-year rationing would begin. With that in mind which two crops should we plant this coming year?"

"Wheat for sure. Someone else can pick the other crop."

"You'd better hope we don't have a bad year, John. If we do, that will really screw up your plan."

"I think we'll plant soybeans as the second crop. We can get double duty off of them, harvest the oil for biodiesel and mix the meal with corn and oats for feed."

"If we get 40-bushels of wheat per acre, we should have about 25,000-bushels. I think we can count on the same yield on soybeans, 25,000-bushels. Of course, that will mean we'll only get about $\frac{1}{3}$ the amount of oil, but it will fatten the cattle. Say, are we going to increase our cattle herd? I think the folks in Prescott Valley could really use the meat."

"I think we should do that Phil. We should also considering adding pork and poultry."

"What no rabbits?"

"Take your pick, chicken or rabbits."

"Why not both?"

"Do you have a good recipe for southern fried rabbit?"

"Not really."

"Okay, it will be chickens. We have all winter to construct a hen house and chicken lot. That will keep our hired hands busy with something besides security. I'll have to admit that their deciding to move here was a real blessing. The only thing that worries me is that they might decide to attack your place when Moira and the kids are the only ones there." "She'll just go to the shelter and lock up. She can use the radio to call us and we can be there in a few minutes. Oh, by the way, Moira is expecting."

"Again? I guess Shelia and I should have sent her to Planned Parenthood."

"She was on the pill, but made her own decision and stopped taking it. She didn't even tell me until she knew she was pregnant again. In fact, I don't know if she told her mother or Ashley."

"If she told Sheila, she didn't mention it to me."

"I sure hope we get a son this time."

"And, if you don't?"

"I guess we might keep trying. For all I know, we could end up with a girl's baseball team, in a league of their own."

"Tom Hanks, Geena Davis and Madonna."

"Huh?"

"The movie."

"I must have missed that one."

"Rosie was in it."

"That explains why I didn't see it, I don't like her. If that makes me homophobic, so be it."

"Wheat and soybeans? Sounds like a plan; are we okay on seed?"

"We have more than enough wheat. I think we got enough soybeans in Fresno. We'd better plant soybeans first up to 630 acres and plant wheat after."

"Do we have enough storage for 25,000-bushels of both?"

"Easily, the storage was constructed extra-large."

"Hard Red or Durum?"

"Maybe a little of both. We can plant a lot of Roma tomatoes and can a large amount of pasta sauce. We can make both rolled and extruded pasta. It may be a slow process, but we can do it."

"I'll take note that you didn't say easily."

"No Frank, it won't be easy, just doable. It's powered equipment but is more for home use than commercial use so we can't make a huge amount at once. We have a complete set of dies for the extruder, but I'd suggest we only make spaghetti and macaroni. We can use the roller for egg noodles and fettuccini."

"As far as that goes Phil, making pasta sauce will be a lot of work. We'll have to juice the tomatoes, add seasonings and reduce the volume by about half. I'm glad we have a juicer."

"We sure won't be getting 4 batches of spaghetti sauce in one day, unless someone stays up all night reducing the sauce to the right thickness."

"We have the men's wives to help with that; we should have more than enough labor."

"It's just a shame we don't have a building dedicated to canning with enough propane burners to use to cook and can."

"What's to say we can't?"

"Would we be able to find everything we'd need in Prescott Valley?"

"If not there, Prescott for sure."

"Are you really sure you want to go into Prescott?"

"Is there any reason why we shouldn't? There's no way they can be certain it was us that did in those two bunches."

"I'm sure some of those men must have told someone where they were going."

"It was purely self-defense and even SCOTUS says you have a right to self-defense. I've known Steve Waugh since before he was elected in 2005. He won't give us any trouble and I'm fairly sure if we have trouble, he'll step in. The same goes for Randy Oaks and Mike Kabbel of the Police Department."

"A person can't do any better than having the Sheriff, Chief of Police and Assistant Chief on your side. Still, they can't be everywhere."

"I didn't say we wouldn't be careful. I do think it's worth the risk to semi-industrialize our canning operation. I wish now we had bought two truckloads of jars and about twice as many lids."

"Yes, especially the lids. We can use the jars until they break but the lids are single use only. You know, we never did drive up and down I-17 to see what we could find. There may not be much left, but it couldn't hurt to look. Although we have snow, the roads seem to be clear. Want to try it?"

"It might make a good winter project. We'll take the farm truck and Frank's generator. I suppose we'd better pick up a few batteries in Prescott Valley and drag some of the PRI products along. Better yet, we can take 4 drums of stabilized diesel and one of stabilized gas. We'll drain the tanks and replace the fuel with good fuel."

Well, it took 3 days to set up and three of the hired hands were going along. Bob was staying behind, to keep an eye on things. That meant doing the chores and sitting in the cupola. We took off the 4th morning and headed south to join up with I-17. We would take it as close to Phoenix as possible, cross the median and work our way north to Flagstaff. The final segment would be from Flagstaff back to our starting point. Moira couldn't find the list she'd made up when the subject of possibly going to Phoenix came up some time back.

We figured the canning building could wait so we wouldn't have to build it in drifting snow. We took 89 south and got on 69 outside of Prescott. We took 69 south to the junction of I-17, very near the Agua Fria National Monument. Marty Robbins mentioned Agua Fria in some song; it was Agua Fria, Arizona and Big Red was based on Billy the Kid. Did New Mexico have Rangers? Texas, California and Arizona did. However, the Arizona Rangers were featured in the song, *Big Iron*, in Western singer Marty Robbins' album Gunfighter Ballads & Trail Songs.

To the town of Agua Fria rode a stranger one fine day Hardly spoke to folks around him didn't have too much to say No one dared to ask his business no one dared to make a slip for the stranger there among them had a big iron on his hip Big iron on his hip

It was early in the morning when he rode into the town He came riding from the south side slowly lookin' all around He's an outlaw loose and running came the whisper from each lip And he's here to do some business with the big iron on his hip big iron on his hip

In this town there lived an outlaw by the name of Texas Red Many men had tried to take him and that many men were dead He was vicious and a killer though a youth of twenty four And the notches on his pistol numbered one an nineteen more One and nineteen more

Now the stranger started talking made it plain to folks around Was an Arizona ranger wouldn't be too long in town

He came here to take an outlaw back alive or maybe dead And he said it didn't matter he was after Texas Red After Texas Red

Wasn't long before the story was relayed to Texas Red But the outlaw didn't worry men that tried before were dead Twenty men had tried to take him twenty men had made a slip Twenty one would be the ranger with the big iron on his hip Big iron on his hip

The morning passed so quickly it was time for them to meet It was twenty past eleven when they walked out in the street Folks were watching from the windows every-body held their breath They knew this handsome ranger was about to meet his death About to meet his death

There was forty feet between them when they stopped to make their play And the swiftness of the ranger is still talked about today Texas Red had not cleared leather fore a bullet fairly ripped And the ranger's aim was deadly with the big iron on his hip Big iron on his hip

It was over in a moment and the folks had gathered round There before them lay the body of the outlaw on the ground Oh he might have went on living but he made one fatal slip When he tried to match the ranger with the big iron on his hip Big iron on his hip

We joined up with I-17 after bucking snow part of the time on our southbound drive. The freeway was reasonably clear of snow. There were many stalled cars along the road and some contained desiccated bodies. We came upon our first truck, a bread delivery truck and it was filled with dried out and moldy bread. The next truck held automobile repair parts, but nothing we could use. The third truck had a delivery for Costco; I sure wish Moira had found her list. The battery was dead, frozen and had cracked. While Jeremy and Chad drained the tanks, Sam and I changed the batteries.

It took a fair amount of cranking to get the tractor to start and when it did, it ran rough for 20 minutes. Eventually, we dispatched Sam home with the tractor trailer rig. The next find of value was a tanker with a mixed load of gas and diesel. We drained and replaced the fuel, replaced the batteries and sent it home. The final truck we found worth taking was an Albertson's truck. That used up our last barrel of diesel and last batteries. It was particularly hard to start and really ran rough for about 30 minutes. However, we called it a day and Jeremy drove our latest find home.

In our absence, Bob had been busy clearing the snow away from a large space where we could park the trucks. The Chevron fuel tanker held 12,000-gallons of diesel and

4,000-gallons of gasoline. We added 6 gallons of PRI-D. The gasoline was treated with 2-gallons of PRI-G. We inspected the trailers and discovered broken bottles and bulged cans. About the only thing we could salvage was staples and oils. I had been hoping to find some jars or lids. However, the bathroom tissue was a pleasant surprise, 4 pallets full of Charmin in the Costco truck.

It was late so we let it sit until the next day. Then we went through the two grocery trucks discarding the damaged goods and sorting and storing the remainder in one of the trailers. That's all we got out of two trailers worth of food, one trailer load of mostly dry goods. We also got what Moira wanted but didn't need at the moment.

Every other day, weather permitting we worked our way down I-17 towards Phoenix. We found a fair number of trucks, but few were carrying anything of use. It continued that way until we found a UPS semi. We went through the cargo looking for anything that stood out. Under some boxes were some crates that we immediately recognized. They were the wooden crates Ammoman shipped the Lithuanian surplus in. There were 10 cases being shipped to a dealer in Phoenix. We took that, but didn't see anything else worth taking.

By the time we'd worked our way to north of Phoenix and changed course north we had collected about two trailers full of food and soft goods like bathroom tissue, paper towels and feminine hygiene supplies. Northbound we found another tanker with 12,000-gallons of diesel. I-17 splits in a few places and this was one where you couldn't see one side of the road from the other. We recovered the fuel and a truckload of new batteries that hadn't had the electrolyte added.

What we didn't find was disappointing, no jars or lids, nothing that could be of use in setting up the canning building. When we got to Flagstaff in April, we collected what we needed for the project there. We got two Viking 6-burner ranges, the big ones, and propane conversion kits. We also found plumbing supplies in a plumbing shop so we could have water, plus a 200 gallon propane hot water heater. Finally, we added stainless steel work tables from a restaurant supply and some knives, a meat band saw, commercial knife sharpener and extra saw blades.

"We're going to need a walk in cooler to age the meat, a tenderizer, slicer and a grinder. We need to go back to the restaurant supply and see what's available."

"Why don't you take Jeremy and Chad and get that done? Take a HEMTT and the trailer."

We found a 9'8"×9'8" Kolpak walk in refrigerator that included a floor. It measured 7'6" high and had a 1hp motor. As nearly as we could tell, this guy was a dealer for an Ohio company. We had no difficulty finding a commercial slicer and tenderizer, but the commercial grinder wasn't anywhere we looked. We got one from an abandoned grocery store and spent a lot of time cleaning it. It even had a sausage stuffing attachment.

Dad decided with Ashley where we wanted to locate the processing building (on our acreage) and Bob scraped it level. They went to the lumberyard in Prescott Valley and got the lumber, nails, roofing and insulation. We threw up forms on the barely thawed ground and poured a 3½" slab. When it was cured we erected the framing and covered the outside with galvanized metal sheets and insulated the inside. We used roof trusses; the ones available actually determined the size of the building, added OSB, tarpaper and shingles.

We had it done and were ready to plant about the same time. It would only take 4 people to plant the wheat and soybeans and could have been done with two in a pinch. Dad, Frank and I under the supervision of Ashley, Shelia and Moira installed the Viking stoves, the meat processing equipment, a small bathroom, the walk in refrigerator and the stainless processing tables. When we were done, our next chore was to move all of the jars and lids to the small building.

The building was only 24' wide but 40' long giving us just shy of 1,000ft². We talked about moving Ashley's QD 12500 up to power the place and use Franks China diesel for hers until we could get another QD 12500. I asked Chad to find just one more of the QD 12500s so we wouldn't have to use Ashley's. He got the generator, 2 55-gallon drums of Valvoline and filters.

We also raised the price we were willing to pay for used jars to 2 silver dimes if they came with 3 or more new lids. Money was becoming near and dear because of the number of things people couldn't buy. A bundle 12 rolls of bathroom tissue was going for \$2 face in the silver coins. With silver around \$30 an ounce, that amounted to about \$42 a bundle.

Coffee was even more expensive, \$3 face for the 3½# (57oz) can. Things were getting very scarce and there was money to be made without gouging. We decided to try a trip to Phoenix. Our goal was soft goods and coffee this trip. If it proved successful, we'd go every time we could. We took Chad and Jeremy along to ride shotgun. We also mounted the machine guns on the HEMTTs and brought along both AT-4s and LAWs.

All together Costco had 14 stores in the greater Phoenix area. Dad's list might be a bit dated but it was as of July, 2008. We decided to start at the western suburbs and eventually move closer to the downtown area with what we imagined had a higher radiation level. We had two empty semis and took those plus the folk lift. The fork lift we had couldn't reach to the top shelves so we took a battery charger and the China diesel to recharge the forklift batteries. BTW, Moira found her list and beside the pads, she wanted a large assortment of spices and sugar, salt, oil, shortening and yeast we could find. She also wanted an electric ice cream maker. Probably to go with the pickles she had developed a craving for.

It Doesn't Get Any Better Than This – Chapter 6

We found a Westside store that was intact, but not for long. The first thing we did was to start to charge the fork lift batteries. Then, using the fork lift we brought with us, we began loading our priority items like the coffee and soft goods. We cleaned out the Folgers and Starbucks coffee. The latter was strictly a trade item, it was awful. We continued by adding spices, flour, granulated sugar, powdered sugar, brown sugar, salt, pepper, vanilla, yeast, shortening/oils, cinnamon, chili powder, dried garlic and onion flakes and powder, cocoa powder and all the liquor we could squeeze in.

The fork lift batteries were charged by then and we reached higher and got the top tier and the middle tier. The was no indication of any problem with the canned meats like Spam, tuna, salmon, Kirkland beef and chicken or the shelf stable canned hams. What wouldn't fit in either of the overloaded semis went into the two HEMTTs or the M1095 trailer. We did the best we could sorting it as it was loaded, but it would need to be unloaded, inventoried and reloaded.

Our final stop was several Phoenix guns shops located mostly north of downtown where the Capitol was. We got ammo and reloading supplies plus reloading equipment. They had some nice firearms on display and I put what I wanted in the back of the HEMTT I was driving. We found a class III dealer on the north edge of town and checked his place out. Most of the rifles were converted AR15s and of little interest. The Yellow Pages also pointed us to a knife shop that sold Randall and Cold steel knives. We took all of the Randall's and a large assortment of the Cold Steel knives, swords, tomahawks and spears.

We had a two day layover at home while the goods were resorted and inventoried. I took two of the knives, a Randall 8" model 2 fighting stiletto and a model 12-11" Confederate Bowie. My Cold Steel selections were a Special Forces shovel and a pair of Vietnam Tomahawks. I still had my folding Case knife for light work.

A gun shop in Scottsdale sold the Ruger Mark IIs with the integrated suppressor. Although I had the USP Tactical with silencer, having a few of the .22s couldn't hurt and I took them and several cases of CCI Subsonic .22 LR 40gr HP (# 0056). It came in cases of 5000 rounds. There were enough to give everyone, including our wives, one pistol and 2 bricks of the ammo. I guess I had itches I wanted to scratch too.

We returned 3 days later and found two Costco's gutted. There were more, so we kept looking. One had a semi backed up to, so we got it running and then moved the second truck to the dock. It was much of the same as the first store, except we got more liquor, infant formula and a large quantity of cheese.

It was time to plant and after doing the sorting and inventory, we began planting the wheat. We had enough for 600 acres, leaving 660 for soybeans. We attended the first Farmer's market and had to set up a triple sized display. Several people asked where we got the factory processed food; our response, *Around*.

We were asked by several people if we had smaller packages of some things like the beans. We didn't but got a meat department scale and several boxes of plastic bags and measured out the quantity they wanted. We charged the same price per pound after making calculations on a calculator. We were asked if we had batteries, D, C AA and AAA. We did but hadn't brought them. We promised to bring some the following week.

Steve Waugh stopped by our stand.

"Been looting?"

"Salvaging from abandoned stores in the Phoenix area."

"Still hot down there?"

"Around 300mR/hour in a few places; some of the goods came from trucks on I-17. Is there a problem?"

"Have you been telling people the source of your new found wealth?"

"No, when someone asked, we didn't volunteer. All we told them was, *Around*. A person has to be very careful down there, there are many hot spots. After all Steve, we're the ones running the risk to recover the stuff. Is it a problem?"

"We can let it pass as long as you're not gouging. You've probably kept many people from starving. How big is your operation now?"

"Ashley and Dad combined their two sections. We set aside 5 acres each for the homesteads, 5 acres for garden and are planting the balance. Last year, we planted 6 210acre fields. This year, we put in 600 acres of wheat and 660 of soybeans. Next year, we'll plant corn, great northern and pinto beans. The third year will be canola and oats."

"Canola?"

"It produces canola oil. Good for cooking and producing biodiesel."

"You have a biodiesel setup?"

"We can produce five hundred gallons a day. We also produce our own alcohol to use in making the biodiesel."

"All of it?"

"All of what?"

"Do you use all of the ethanol to make biodiesel?"

"Not exactly. We sometimes have a little left over that we cut to 125 proof and store in charred white oak barrels. It's still aging."

"Could I get some? For medicinal purposes, of course."

"It won't be ready for a minimum of 2 years. If you want a bottle of booze, just say so and tell me which kind."

"You have liquor?"

"Yes and we have cigarettes, although none of us smoke."

"Salvage?"

"Yes. What's your pleasure Steve?"

"Got any gin?"

"Cheap or expensive?"

"What do you have?"

"Gordon's and Gilbey's, Tanqueray, Bombay Sapphire and Beefeater's. What do you have to trade?"

"What do you want?"

"What do you have?"

"Actually, not much of anything. We all have some kind of Liberty Garden and buy food from you folks. We've rationed our fuel, but it's almost gone. About the only thing we have a large supply of is firewood."

"We all use propane and have a good supply of that."

"Yeah, I'll bet."

"Just out of curiosity, which of the 5 gins do you prefer?"

"I generally drink Gordon's, with tonic."

"Okay, I'll keep that in mind."

I was hoping that the thought that he might score a bottle of gin from us would keep his mind off our salvaging and homemade bourbon. Prescott Valley needed so much and,

in comparison to their needs, we had so little to give. We sold out by noon and returned home, with more jars and lids plus a little of the silver.

"I asked the Sheriff about body armor and he suggested we get it from Navajo Depot."

"Interceptor? That crap is heavy and wouldn't have done me any good," Dad replied.

"We could have gotten Dragon Skin in Fresno, but it wouldn't have made a difference either."

"We'll stick with the Second Chance. What else did the Sheriff and you talk about?"

"I mentioned the fact that we were keeping the extra alcohol for bourbon and that we had cigarettes and liquor for trade."

"What's he like?"

"Gordon's gin."

"I'd have figured him for a bourbon man, or maybe tequila."

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We produced 24,000 bushels of wheat, $\frac{1}{3}$ durum and $\frac{2}{3}$ hard red. We produced just short of 25,000 bushels of soybeans. It was decided to press the oil and sell some as vegetable oil and turn the remainder into biodiesel. We knew that canola would yield three times as much oil, but we really didn't need a lot of diesel at the moment. With our enlarged herd, the meal was more important and we'd be selling beef next year.

We hadn't located any hogs, but we did have chickens. We segregated the pen, keeping the roosters in with brood hens and all the pullets separate. Even in these bad times, the broilers were ready to butcher in 8 weeks. Current practice was to allow hens to lay eggs for two years and replace them, not using the carcass. Old practice was to the use the hen as a stew or baking hen, they went about 7-8 pounds. We couldn't afford to waste 8 pounds of chicken, even if you had to bake it because it was tough.

The next time I went to Prescott Valley, I took the Sheriff his bottle of Gordon's gin. In addition to the full cases, we had a few loose bottles and I figured, "What the hell..." The Sheriff hadn't been in his usual haunt, Prescott the last time we'd set up and we'd discussed gin among other things. He was at the substation in Prescott Valley again to-day.

"Sheriff in?"

"In the office."

"Steve?"

"Phil."

"Here you go, found a loose bottle."

"Thank you. Did you go up to Navajo Depot?"

"No, we spent our time putting in a cold cellar. We harvested around 24,000-bushels of wheat, $\frac{1}{3}$ durum and $\frac{2}{3}$ hard red. We'll grind the durum and start turning out pasta. We have a bit of a problem."

"What's that?"

"People are hoarding their jars, including the jars they got filled from us. We had a truckload of jars from Jardin plus collected about another 1,000 from around town. There isn't a jar or lid to be had. That's going to equate to no produce from our garden."

"What do you have to sell from your crops?"

"Wheat, bread flour and pasta. We'll sell a portion of the vegetable oil but only to people who supply their own containers."

"Why don't you restrict your trades to trading for Mason jars?"

"Hmm... good idea, maybe we'll do that."

I talked it over with Dad and Ashley with Moira adding her two cents.

"How about they furnish the jar and we fill it with wheat, flour or pasta? One jar equals what it will hold. One jar will buy a half measure of oil."

"That sounds like Revelations when the third horse appeared."

"What's that, Ashley?"

"A quart of wheat for a day's wages, and three quarts of barley for a day's wages, and do not damage the oil and the wine!"

"I guess I have to look it up."

"Revelations, Chapter 6."

"It's right before, I looked, and there before me was a pale horse! Its rider was named Death, and Hades was following close behind him. They were given power over a fourth of the earth to kill by sword, famine and plague, and by the wild beasts of the earth." Dad said.

"When did we get religion?"

"We've always had it. After your mother died, I sort of got away from Church, is all. That's where I first met Ashley."

I hadn't set foot in a church, except for my wedding, for so long that I didn't recall which church we had attended. What Dad had just said, set something off in me.

"So when Ashley's husband was gored by the bull, you naturally provided comfort?"

"It wasn't like that Phillip. We'd known each other for years. She and Clyde (her husband), helped me when your mother died. I offered my support and that's all. It was quite some time before we began to see each other. I wasn't raised the way you're suggesting."

If looks could have killed, Ashley was cutting my heart out. I obviously got that wrong, but it had occurred to me and I just blurted it out. Moira was icy silent all the way home.

"Look, I blew it, I'm sorry. I apologized to Dad and Ashley, do you want an apology too?"

"Shut up and drive, Phillip."

If you assume that full name equals my being in trouble, you've got it right. Phillip=disapproval. When the nicknames go, start looking for the alligators. Try your backside.

Stuff happens, but it was a 3 days before Moira would deign to talk to me. Dad took longer, about 10 days. Ashley, however, ignored it like I hadn't stuck my foot in my mouth and bit it off at the knee. Of course that caused me to apologize to her even more while Dad got *Sorry* a couple of times and Moira just that once. Ashley even became somewhat friendlier and wondered out loud how long I'd buried that feeling. I told her the truth; it was a thing of the moment that I blurted out without thinking.

Ashley and Clyde had two children, one of whom lived in Los Angeles and the other who lived in New York. What she must have gone through as we learned which cities had been attacked was beyond imagining. She kept any grief she felt to herself and concentrated on making Jasmine and little Grace feel very special. Jasmine was a toddler now and Grace was getting close. Moira's pregnancy, like her first two, hadn't been the most comfortable or uneventful. She had been pregnant with Grace when the war came and delivered the following winter. This pregnancy wasn't much better; she was very uncomfortable; her back hurt so badly she had problems walking at times and the pressure on her bladder meant she needed to walk a lot. At least this time she wasn't so grumpy.

You have to figure, based on past incidents, that if trouble was coming, it would happen during winter as it had before. We'd be tied up making ethanol and biodiesel and would have our stock of food on hand for the next year. We'd beaten off raiders twice with no injuries given the cover the barn's loft provided. If we were going after Interceptor, it was now or never. We'd include the ESAPI plates although they added a little weight. Our situation was different from combat soldiers because we were fighting from fixed positions, despite what George S. Patton said (fixed fortifications are monuments to man's stupidity).

Another thing, we should have had the election last month and didn't. Hopefully, Biden succeeded Obama. Have you ever eaten Moose? I have eaten it and Elk, the Elk is much better. Venison is better than either. We were getting ready soon to butcher beef and the chickens. After our discussion about chicken verses rabbits, we'd ended up with both. The rabbits were in a raised cage over the swimming pool filled with potting soil and earthworms. The tilapias were raised in farm tanks and fed worms and vegetation. I'd never tried it, but Dad had picked it up on Frugal's and had his mind made up.

Fresh Walleye taken from cold water was my favorite, but no one was making fishing trips to Canada any more. And if they did, they were probably staying north of the border trying to shovel their way through the snow. The snow on the mountains in our area wasn't melting off, yet another sign of the nuclear/volcanic winter.

The watch schedule was resumed and observers were in the cupola on both barns. On Moira's last trip to the doctor, he ordered an ultrasound and she learned we had a son. We narrowed the names to John and Franklin and couldn't agree. I suggested Indiana, but she said Indiana was the name of the dog. We settled on Chad, we both liked the name.

The baby was due around Christmas so probably Ashley and Sheila would end up being the midwives. Chad, Hank and I made the trip to Navajo Deport to get the interceptor. It was harder to tell the sizes than we thought it would be, so we took two sizes for each person and double the number of ESAPI plates we'd need for level IV protection. They had various optional panels for the side, groin, shoulder, etc. We took extra, maybe Steve would want what we didn't for his office. We took the MOLLE pouches that went with the outer vests to permit us some degree of uniformity. We also got a few boxes of ACUs and once you got used to them they were fairly comfortable.

We thought for a moment or two that we had a happening on Thanksgiving Day; however that turned out to be a small dog pack that didn't approach the buildings. On Boxing Day (26Dec), it was different. They were learning, they came in with winter camouflage using sniper rifles. The cupolas had steel plates and bulletproof glass and they had .50 caliber rifles and Mk211. The word went out and we were assembled in 3-4 minutes ready to repel invaders. We couldn't see them until they moved and this group was outstanding. If I didn't know better, I'd swear they were a combat unit of 3 squads. Come to think of it, I don't know better, we'd better be careful. With the exception of Moira the wives were subject to call up to back us up. She'd take the kids to the shelter and they lock themselves in until we gave the all clear.

Before I describe what happened, allow me to point out we had acquired the Interceptor just in time. Moira put a call into the Sheriff and he said he'd bring a posse from Prescott. I wondered whose side they would be on. We added Smith Enterprises Vortex flashhiders with the QD suppressors to the rifles to reduce flash, sound and anything that might give our position away. Their sniper rifles could easily penetrate the walls of the loft if they had a target. We were sparing with our shots only firing when we had someone in the clear.

It only took Steve, 6 Deputies and another dozen or so militiamen ten minutes to arrive. Based on the information he exchanged with Moira, his unit approached the attackers from the rear and flanks, putting them in a cross fire. Together we took out about half of their force before they laid down their arms and surrendered. When Steve started to question them, they responded with name, rank, serial number and date of birth. That explained the skill they shown but they could have done better with proper planning and Steve focused on why they attacked the way they did.

"We didn't figure on a lot of people being here or as well organized as they were. They thought most of them would be at Wal-Mart or Costco exchanging their gifts."

"Are you from out of the area?"

"New Mexico."

"Your reconnaissance let you down fellas. This isn't their first fight and they won the first two. These people could have chewed you up and spit you out."

"How do you figure?"

"They have Claymore mines, LAW rockets, a .50 caliber and a .30 caliber machinegun. If you'd gotten too close, they could have employed hand grenades. You may notice they're wearing body armor and most are using the M14 rifles. I believe they also have thermal imaging."

"Who are you people?"

"We're just a small group of preppers."

"What are you prepared for?"

"Everything."

"John, cover them while we pat them down."

"What's going to happen to them?"

"We'll arraign them, have a quick trial and probably hang them."

"What about their weapons?"

"You can have first choice and take one weapon per person. That should take care of most of their arms."

They had CETME, FN FALs, G3s, M14s, and a few HK417s (MR762 civilian version). We had 7.62×51mm NATO running out of our ears.

"We'll look them over, Steve. Do you and your militia want what we don't?"

"Sure do, we have mostly Russian firearms and AR15s/M16s."

"Leave us the MR762s and M14s and take the rest. Let us know how much ammo you'll need."

"You'd do that in view of the way the people in Prescott acted towards you?"

"They've paid for that mistake; we haven't been selling food to them."

"You have food?" one of the militiamen asked.

"Kind of like we were told, none to spare, but that only applies to people who wouldn't share with us."

"At the moment, that is totally true, we're just about out of food."

"We can sell you beef and beans plus cornmeal and flour. We have a small amount of liquor and some cigarettes."

"Do you have any canned goods?"

"Home canned only. The price is an empty jar the same size and a lid plus one silver dime."

"We don't have much silver, what else will you take?"

"Two jars the same size and two lids is an even trade."

It Doesn't Get Any Better Than This – Chapter 7

"I see what we can do."

"Make a list of what you want and bring us the jars. We'll do the trades, no sense in being stubborn about it."

"You converted to solar and wind?"

"We did it for most of our needs and swapped out generators for smaller models."

"What did you do with the old generators?"

"Stored them."

"Interested in making a sale, we could sure use generators."

"They're diesel, is that a problem?"

"We have two farmer's producing biodiesel."

"We're doing that ourselves. We're planting two farm crops per year and can get biodiesel out of soybean oil or canola oil. We're going with a three year plan of planting two crops per year. Wheat and soybeans the first year, corn, great northern and pinto beans the second year and canola and oats the third year. Since we'll be extracting vegetable oil, we have some of that for sale. You'll have to provide your own container. Say, would you know anywhere we could get some hogs?"

"I might, what are you looking for?"

"Six sows and a good boar."

"What do you have to trade?"

"Diesel, food, beef and the other things I mentioned. We're in really good shape on the sins, plenty of liquor and cigarettes."

"Do you have some shine?"

"You want moonshine when you could have real booze?"

"It's got more of a kick."

"We don't have any at the moment, but can have some in just a few days."

"Okay, here's the deal, 6 sows and a good boar with different bloodlines for 10 gallons of shine and 20 cartons of Marlboros."

"See you in a week."

It occurred to me that nobody would sell 6 sows and a boar for booze and smokes, provided he owned them. Do they hang pig thieves? The thing about pork is that the sows farrow twice a year and produce large litters of 10 or more pigs. Market weight is 225-250 pounds and 60 pigs at 225 pounds are about 6³/₄ tons of meat. Well, it's actually less, you have to subtract the offal, hide, hooves and what not. Still, we should get close to 4 tons. That would be 120 hams, 120 smoked picnics, plus 120 loins and 60 slabs of US style bacon and pork liver. We might want to smoke the boned out loins for Canadian style bacon, to preserve the meat without freezing it.

We couldn't ask the guy for ownership papers for the hogs because there wasn't any such thing. What we could do was get a bill of sale to protect us making us holders in due course. At worst, all we could lose is the 7 hogs we'd traded for. Any litters we'd produced and disposed of would be ours to keep. It seemed like it was worth the risk, when he showed up a week later, he got his 10-gallons of 190-proof ethanol and 20 cartons of Costco cigarettes.

We set about letting the boar do his thing and it wasn't long before the sows were in the family way. Meanwhile we started to get inquiries from the *good citizens* of Prescott. It was individual inquiries from people who had something we wanted, like mason jars and lids. We couldn't be totally sure the lids were still good, but it was another risk for us to take.

Most people were interested in food rather than things like cigarettes and booze. It had been so long since the double whammy that most folks had been forced to give up smoking. Only those few people who weren't worried about their supply of food, like the guy who sold us the hogs, concerned themselves with smokes and booze. No doubt there had been a lot of frayed tempers for a while there just after...

We usually got more jars than lids, but not always. It would seem that other people knew about Canning Pantry and the sales of case lots of lids. A case of regular mouth lids was 60 dozen and wide mouth 36 dozen. We'd purchased the case lots of Mrs. Wages pickle mixes, tomato mixes and Pomona Pectin. We got so we were making all kinds of trades and when we offered beef, even if it was only ground beef, we started raking in the jars and lids.

We continued right up to the first snowfall, a rip snorting full blown blizzard. The winds were blowing about 50mph and the snow seemed to be coming down horizontal. We were ready this year and quickly plowed out the areas around the buildings and one track down the road to Dad and Ashley's. What we really needed was a truck mounted snow blower like various DOTs used to clean the roads. Without one, we were cut off from Prescott Valley and Prescott.

"Blow wind blow."

"Quite the storm, isn't it?"

"I wonder when the last time was that they had a blizzard in central Arizona."

"We have them every year in the mountain regions, but down here, in the valleys, not that often."

"Do you think we can get to Flagstaff?"

"We need more guns and ammo?"

"No, but a truck mounted snowplow would be nice. Get one of those big rotary units that throw the snow a good distance off the road and we can open the roads to Prescott and Prescott Valley. We were doing pretty well on trading lids and jars before the storm and I think that the storm will have people rethinking the level of supplies."

"A trip like that could be tricky."

"Are there chains for either of the HEMTTs?"

"I didn't look. Maybe in that box on the side?"

"Do you know the tire size?"

"It's a radial traction, non-directional, 16:00x20". The sidewall says 395/85R20 XZL and they have that CTIS (Central Tire Inflation System)." The tires on our trucks were made by Michelin and the XZL was their exclusive.

The side boxes held chains, but not enough. We took the chains from both side boxes and equipped all 10 wheels with chains. It's hard driving with chains on the front tires, but we were going to go in all wheel drive and go slow. Another advantage of the HEMTTs was the all-wheel drive capacity that would get you through almost anything. It did, but it took the better part of the day before we arrived in Flagstaff, located the DOT garage and the truck mounted rotary snowplow. We took time to service the engine, replace the fuel and fill the sandbox with that salt/sand mix they had. It was well after dark before we returned because on the way back, we cut through some of the drifts on the road.

"You're late."

"I'm sorry about that, but we had a devil of a time just getting to Flagstaff. We found the DOT garage and the snowplow, but had to change the oil in the engine, charge the battery, swap out the diesel, and add sand and salt to the box so we had traction. On the

way home, we had to cut through a few drifts that blew in after we had gone to Flagstaff."

"Supper is in the oven, but it's probably a little dried out. I tried to keep it good until 9pm, and then just gave up."

"I didn't think to take a radio, Moira, I'm sorry."

"Mother is here if I had a problem and she could call Ashley and John if they had been needed. I'm getting close to my due date and I just worried that stress might make the baby come, it's overdue, you know."

"We'll use the truck and snowplow to clear a way to Prescott and Prescott Valley tomorrow, if you can wait until then."

"No promises, but, I'll try."

You don't try to do something, you either do it or you don't. It was an old lesson I'd learned a long time ago. You put a penny on the table and ask someone to try and move it. They either move it or they don't, there is no such thing as trying. There are some things you can try to do. For example, a bad guy needs shooting and you aim at him and come close but don't hit him. You tried to kill him and the crime would be attempted murder, if what you did was a crime. There is a difference, even if I'm not explaining it well.

Moira tried, I'll give her that. She woke me up around 3am and told me her water broke. I called Dad on the radio and told him Moira was delivering and we need Ashley. Then, I went to the trailer and woke up Frank and Sheila. Sheila told me to boil some water, but this wasn't our first home delivery and I knew what she wanted, for me to stay out of the way. I did put on the teapot, but it was for tea.

We were, in the end, a day late getting the snow blower. However, we plowed a road to Prescott and Prescott Valley the next day and took Moira and our son to be examined by the ER Doc. They put some drops in his eyes and performed a circumcision. He didn't like that much.

"You have your boy, have you picked out a name?"

"We picked out Chad, is that still the name would you would like Moira?"

"Either Frank or John."

"No Phillip?"

"One is enough."

"How about Prescott Wilson?"

"For what, a name?"

"Yes. I just thought that being the towns in the area have Prescott in their names, well, it would be appropriate."

"Right, do you want John Frank or Frank John?"

"John Frank."

Moira gave the name to the lady recording Johnny's birth and we went home. Of course, everyone was gathered at our place and Ashley and Sheila had a large stockpot of chili cooking. They started the beans soaking last night and now the chili was done, just simmering, collecting flavor. They had also baked bread and had made corn bread for those that wanted it to go with the chili.

"Allow me to formally introduce you to John Frank Wilson."

"Can I hold him Daddy?"

"That's going to be up to your mother Jasmine."

"Sit down in a chair honey, and I'll let you hold him for a few minutes."

You thought maybe that because I didn't talk much about our daughters, I didn't like them? They're kids, for crying out loud. It isn't much of a childhood, I know, but I was letting them enjoy their childhood without making them the center of attention. Grace was toddling along quite well and Jasmine knew to take Grace and herself to the shelter if trouble came. She couldn't close the door to the shelter, but she could get them out of harm's way.

Jasmine's vocabulary had increased to a point where she could usually make herself understood. She knew hot and cold and many of life's early lessons. Too young to be a shooter, even with a BB gun, she none the less sat at the table and marveled when I cleaned one of the firearms. She knew that the long weapon with the small hole was a rifle, the one with the large hole was a shotgun and the one that Daddy grunted when he picked it up was a bigger rifle. She could also identify the cartridges as being rifle, shotgun or handgun. It was confusing to her because we had .45acp and .45 Colt plus 9mm and .22LR. We were in the process of learning action types: lever action, bolt action, pump action and semi-auto/full-auto.

"Why do you teach her these things?"

"She's interested and it's a just in case measure."

"Just in case what? She can't pick up any one of the firearms, except for a handgun and we don't want her to have one of them and play with it."

"I've stressed safety every time and told her that until you told her it was okay to touch one, she couldn't."

"You put it all on me?"

"No, but I did give you final approval."

"Don't mind me, Phil; I'm not producing enough milk for John."

"We have cow's milk."

"I switched to the Enfamil."

"Is it still good?"

"Not according to the label, but I mixed some up and tasted it. It tasted the same as when we bought it, yucky. John seems to like it and he's putting on weight."

"We have two girls and a boy, do we want to stop here?"

"I hadn't thought about it. I can go back on the pill until we decide."

"You were on the pill before."

"I missed taking it one day, can you believe that?"

"You need to let your body rest for a while, I'm sure having a baby must take something out of you."

"Besides the baby, you mean," she chuckled.

"You looked exhausted after you delivered John."

"I was, but it was a good exhaustion."

I suddenly realized that I hadn't given Moira the attention or respect she deserved. I sometimes got grumpy and I suppose my notes reflect that. There was no other, would be no other and you could take that to the bank. As a husband wife team, each was just an extension of the other. I knew that were I away and she was at home, our home-stead would be just as safe as it would be were the situation reversed.

"Our life has spun so far out of control Moira, when did it all begin?"

"February 26, 1993. Six people were killed and 1,042 others were injured, most during the evacuation that followed the blast."

"What was that, the World Trade Center Bombing?"

"It proved that the World Trade Center was vulnerable. It took another 8 years for the terrorists to exploit that vulnerability, but they did so, quite successfully."

"I heard that even Osama bin Laden didn't expect the building to fall."

"Ramzi Yousef expected Building One (North Tower) to fall into Building Two (South Tower) back in 1993. That didn't happen and 8 years later a Munich cell came up with a better idea, hijacking airplanes and crashing them into the World Trade Center, Pentagon and probably the White House. We'll never know for sure what the last target was (the Capitol) because of those brave passengers.

"Anyway, to continue, Dubya declared the war on terror and sent troops to Afghanistan. If he had stopped at that and waited until we won that war, we probably could have successfully attacked Iraq. Instead, we eventually won Iraq and had to shift troops to Afghanistan to stop that. Meanwhile, Russia began making noises just waiting for an excuse. Georgia gave them one and they didn't stop until they had the Ukraine too. I didn't believe the Russians would launch missiles on us. They didn't start out that way, but they had to be fueling their liquid fueled missiles when they gave the order to launch the nuclear torpedoes.

"Did they really believe they could get the jump on the United States? Dumb, dumb, dumb! The moment our satellites saw a missile plume we knew and only needed radar to confirm what we already knew. Our remaining 450 MM III missiles were on 120-second hold. It took longer than that to send the launch codes but nearly instantly, the missiles took off, their commands coming at the speed of light. Did our missiles go faster than theirs? Did it matter? The only thing I wanted to know was if the rumors that were popping up on the radio net were true. Did whoever hit Yellowstone also hit Long Valley and did they both explode? I remembered our trip to California and the fact that the volcanic ash out there had been deeper."

"How much deeper?"

"About triple what we had here, perhaps more."

"I remember looking at that Yellowstone file; I didn't see any of the Yellowstone volcanoes putting more ash to the west."

"All of them put some except for Mesa Falls."

"Are you sure?"

"I'm nearly positive. Check the file, I could be wrong."

"So, for sure Yellowstone and possibly Long Valley?"

"At the moment, that would be my best guess. We haven't left the area since the war, except to go to Flagstaff, Prescott and Prescott Valley. I don't count the trip to Phoenix because it was too hot to stay. What would you say to our maybe going to California to see how things are out there?"

"Just like that, we have a new baby."

"I wasn't planning on a long trip and we'd make it during good weather. Flagstaff to LA used to only be a trip of 6½ hours; it's only around 465 miles."

"Why would you want to go to Los Angeles?"

"I wouldn't, that was only an example. There's MCLB, Barstow we could check out on the way back and maybe find some night vision. That's where we got those M-40s. We might be able to find a greater diversity of seeds than we have in the Big Valley. We might even find some canning jars. If you'd rather, we could go to northern Utah; Hyrum is north of Salt Lake City."

"Who or what is in Hyrum?"

"JBS (formerly Miller) Meat Packing and Canning Pantry, the place we got the canning equipment, spices, jars and lids. There are several meat processors there, we might get lucky."

"Do you know how to get there?"

"Pickup I-15 and go north past Salt Lake to the Hyrum turnoff."

"Yeah, right."

"It's the alt I-15 route for busses. It turns into US 89 and you turn east on Mt. Sterling Road."

"You sound more like you want to go to Utah than California."

"Actually, we could do both. We'd pick up I-15 in Barstow, just past the MCLB. We'd have to skirt some areas, I assume Las Vegas was nuked and probably Salt Lake City."

"Night vision, you say?"

"That and anything else that might strike our fancy."

"M1As, P-14 and shotguns for medium range work?"

"We could take the Tac-50 in its case, we have three now."

"Exploding ammo?"

"I think so, we wouldn't want to carry too much because a 200-round case weighs 50 pounds and that 120-round can weighs almost 40 pounds. We can get more at Barstow if we think we need it."

"I'll talk to Mom and Ashley, if they agree to sit with Johnny, I could use a break. When do you think, April?"

"Late April or early May."

"Do you really think we can find some heirloom seeds?"

"I hope we can, although we don't really need them. It might be nice to try a few different garden crops."

"I'll have to find time to practice, I'm a bit rusty."

"Practice with the cowboy guns, too. We can pull a horse trailer and take two of the geldings in case we want to do some quiet exploring."

"Do you have a .45 Colt revolver and Winchester rifle for me?"

"I will have, I'll talk to someone in Prescott. You have a rifle scabbard for your saddle. Do you know how to use a lariat?"

"Should I?"

"I'll get you one with a set of saddle bags."

When we'd been first married, we'd ridden the horses a lot. I still rode almost weekly, but Moira hadn't set a saddle in about 2 years. She was a good rider so I wasn't too worried, it was like riding a bicycle, you never really forget how. In one way, I'd gotten the cart before the horse since we wouldn't be leaving for about 4 months. I hadn't realized how eager she'd been to just get away. And if she needed time to practice, it was best we find time to do that now. She had 2 rifles, a shotgun and 2 handguns to get accustomed to or to refresh her shooting skills.

I talked to Frank because he had originally taught Moira how to shoot. He seemed eager when I suggested he help to get her back up to speed. A trip to Prescott and 2 ounces of gold supplied the western style firearms and leather. He expressed concern about our making a trip to Hyrum. I told him we'd take the HEMTT and the M1095 trailer to haul what we found. I was relatively certain that some people were probably still at Canning Panty, it's a Mormon operation. He suggested that we take a semi-tractor trailer and lots of gold, who could say what we might find when we got there.

I asked what he meant and he explained that the Mormons claim to one of the twelve tribes of Israel, aka the house of Joseph tribe of Ephraim. You've got me, never heard of them. If they were Jewish descendants, they'd be very good at selling and bartering. Thus he claimed that I was forewarned and should govern myself accordingly. Frank went on to point out that despite the Mormons being Christians, most were very good shots, so we should avoid a confrontation at all cost. If they had what we wanted and were asking a reasonable price, pay it. I told him I had dealt with Mormons over the years and had friends who were Mormon and didn't expect any problems.

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It turned out to be a long 4 months. Moira and Frank got out and shot when the weather permitted, she got to be a good shot with both the Winchester and the 5½" Colt SAA and I found more .45 Colt ammo. By now, Johnny was doing well on the Enfamil and Sheila and Ashley we getting excited about having time to care for him.

I wasn't so sure I wanted to take a 40' semi nearly 700 miles, the most direct route that avoided California entirely, because that meant two vehicles, the semi and the pickup pulling a horse trailer. In the end, it seemed to be the only logical solution unless I wanted to take the HEMTT and trailer plus the pickup and horse trailer. We could carry all the drums of diesel we needed to get there and back and even make the side trip to Barstow. Going up, we'd take US89 to Nephi and pickup I-15 there. Coming back, we stay on I-15 and go through Lost Wages and on to Barstow.

We gathered our camping gear, a chemical toilet, a large supply of food, the weapons and ammo. I selected the horse I usually rode and Moira one that she hadn't rode before. She spent several hours riding to get used to the horse and the horse used to her. I even put some firewood in one of the empty stalls of the 4-horse trailer and put feed in the fourth.

When the day came to depart, there were instructions on top of instructions to Sheila and Ashley, but I think they only listened with one ear. We woke Jasmine and Grace and gave them each hugs and a kiss and told them we'd be back in 2 weeks or less. We departed just after day break and were in Utah in only a couple few hours US 89 is fairly nice scenery but we had to concentrate on the roads because the snow wasn't fully melted. We stopped in the late morning and had lunch; chicken salad sandwiches made with Mayonnaise and finely chopped celery. We didn't have chips to go with them and if we had, they'd have been 4 years stale. We did, however, have a piece of cheese and apples plus a case of Coke Classic that was very well aged.

It Doesn't Get Any Better Than This - Chapter 8

We pushed on and camped for the night on the outskirts of Nephi. It wasn't long before we had visitors.

"Hello the camp."

"Hello yourself. If we're in the wrong place, we'll move."

"Can I come in?"

"Please do."

The man was carrying a slung PTR and wore a Colt pistol in one of those old surplus WW II leather holsters. I stood and positioned myself with the Mossberg at low ready.

"You're not from around here?"

"Arizona, Prescott area."

"Christians?"

"Christians yes, Mormon's no."

"Everyone seems to think all Utah residents are Mormon, they're not. May I ask where you're headed?"

"Hyrum."

"They don't have any meat but the Pantry still has some stock. Big truck, you looking for a big haul?"

"We wanted canning jars and lids, possibly more pressure canners and some of those spice mixes they sell."

"Last I knew, they still had some, but were forced to raise the price to \$1.25 a jar. Have you shopped with them before?"

"Yes we have, does that make a difference?"

"Prior customers get preference depending on how much they spent in the past. I don't know how it works, I've only heard it, not experienced it."

"We haven't spent a lot, two canners, a truck load of jars and lids, all kinds of mixes by the case."

"I think you'll qualify as a major customer. Mind if I sit and take a load off?"

"Find a stump."

"Where can I set my rifle?"

"Lean it up against the truck closest to you."

"Is that coffee I smell? It's been a while."

"Sorry, forgot my manners, would you like a cup?"

"Please. Black will be fine."

"We do have non-dairy creamer and sugar."

"Thank, but I don't use them. I shouldn't really be drinking a caffeinated drink, but I won't tell if you don't."

"What lies ahead of us?"

"Salt Lake City got nuked, but the radiation level is way down. Just stick to I-15. Do you know how to get to Hyrum?"

"Yes, thank you, I have a good map."

"Okay if the boys come in for some coffee?"

"Sure, how many cups do I need?"

"Nine more."

"They'll have to be patient while a second pot brews, but we can start them all out with a half cup."

"Prepper or survivalist?"

"Well, they're pretty much the same thing. We use prepper because survivalist puts people off. We had a shelter, long term storage food, an armory, seeds, had some live-stock and bought more. Would you believe a guy would sell me 6 sows and a boar for 10 gallons of moonshine and 20 cartons of cigarettes?"

"You make shine?"

"Mostly as an ingredient to convert oil to biodiesel."

"Methanol is better."

"Couldn't get any methanol, but we could brew a lot of ethanol."

"Had much trouble?"

"Some. Nothing our group couldn't handle."

When the second pot of coffee was done, Moira added a splash of cold water to settle the grounds and refilled everyone's cup.

"Don't suppose you have an extra can of coffee? I'd pay a reasonable price in pre-65 silver coins."

"What's a reasonable price?"

\$2.00 face value in 50 cent pieces."

"Deal. However, we were planning on a short trip and didn't bring much with us, we only have one spare can and then we'll switch to tea."

"Got any spare tea?"

"One box I think."

"\$2.00?"

"It's Lipton's."

"It doesn't matter. Lipton tea will be fine."

I dug around in the tack room of horse trailer and found the coffee and tea. Half dollars tend to have just a bit more silver than quarter and dimes. 2,000 half dollars generally have close to 720 ounces of silver or .36oz per coin and 4 quarters added up to almost 1.44 oz of silver about \$43 worth, for a can of coffee and box of tea bags. They finished their coffee and bid us farewell. They seemed to be really nice folks, but were armed to the teeth. All of their weapons were the 7.62×51mm NATO cartridge and the pistols uniformly .45acp. All of their guns showed careful attention too. One was a military version HK417 and a second the SCAR H. I think I also saw a LWRC SABR.

The next morning we were up early, had a Mountain House egg breakfast and were on the road by sun up. When we got close to Salt Lake City, I turned the CD V-715 on using the lowest setting. It showed some radiation but less than I'd expected. We continued past and drove on to Hyrum, and stopped at a local gas station that was still pumping fuel, biodiesel. We got directions and went directly to Canning Pantry. There were

vehicles there and I could see people, but the door was locked. I knocked for a minute or two before someone came to the door.

"Can I help you?"

"I hope so, we're looking for jars, lids and those spice mixes."

"Have you bought from us before?"

"Several times, the last name is Wilson and we're from Prescott, Arizona."

"First name?"

"It's John, Ashley or Phillip; I believe we've all ordered."

"Come in and take a seat while I check."

"Thank you."

"You've bought several large orders."

"I believe we have. One shipment of jars and lids came directly from Jardin."

"So I noticed. What can I do for you?"

"We need pints and quarts, preferably regular mouth and several cases of lids. We could also use several cases of the tomato spices and pickle spices plus pectin."

"Our terms are cash on the barrelhead. We only accept gold and silver. How much can you haul?"

"A lot, we brought a semi."

"We're out of wide mouth. We can let you have 8 gross of quarts, 4 gross of pints and 6 cases of regular mouth lids. The jars come with the ring and a lid. We don't have a lot of the Mrs. Wages spices, but you can have what we have if you can pay."

"Added it up on a calculator and tell me how much gold it's going to take."

"I'll need a few minutes."

"We have a few minutes."

"Okay, the jars are \$2,160, the lids \$600, the spices \$2,500. The total is \$5,260 or 3.6 ounces of gold."

"How much more if we get 2 30 quart All American Canners?"

"Two could come to point 4 ounces of gold, a total of 4 ounces."

"We'll take it, where do I back the truck up to?"

"The loading dock is out back. Pull around back and back up to the middle stall."

"Moira will go with you and give you them gold when the order is on the truck."

"Seems reasonable. Sorry about the prices, but jars are in short supply. We have a trainload somewhere between here and Colorado. We've been waiting for three years now for the order to be delivered."

"No problem."

I pulled around back, backed up to the proper stall and a forklift loaded the load. Moira paid the woman and we were south bound and down. We stayed on I-15 all the way to Barstow, stopping once to refill the fuel tanks and have a late lunch. We camped out that night just outside of Baker, California. The next day, we made it to Barstow and spent 3 hours looking for the night vision and a few other things like gas masks, more CBRN filters and more of the Mk 211.

"We already have gas masks."

"They might make good traded goods. We've shot up some of the Mk211, practicing and having more might be a good idea. What I really wanted to find was that day riflescope that you can attach a night scope, the AN/PVS-27, in front of so you have the best of both worlds. We will have to replace the hand guards on some of the rifles with Picatinny rails."

"Where would we get those?"

"I know they're available for the standard and the Loaded, but from different sources. Several firms made them for the M14/M1A. Only Springfield Armory made one for the Loaded. And I suppose that you'd have to get a gunsmith to fit the one for the Loaded. They brought it out in 2008 in their model MA 9827 rifle with the fiberglass stock and stainless steel barrel. Most scope mounts for the rifle are those side attach mounts like the ones we use from Smith Enterprises."

"So now you want to go to Illinois?"

"Nah, we'll figure out something." (The price of the cluster rail was \$545 plus shipping in 2008 when they brought it out, I called and asked, but it was California legal. It was just what I needed, a heavier rifle!)

"It's been an awful short vacation. Are you sure you don't want to go to Illinois? We know the address and we might just be able to get those cluster rails for all of our M1As."

"We'll see when we get home. I have the address; they're on Main Street in Geneseo, Illinois. It must be at least 1,600 miles, maybe more. A trip like that could be awfully dangerous and take at least a week."

"We have enough firepower to stop a small army and I'm enjoying being away from the kids."

"Like I said, we'll see when we get home."

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We got hi Mommy, hi Daddy from the kids; they had been totally entertained in our absence. We explained that we got 576 cases of pints and 1,152 cases of quarts plus 6 cases of lids, all regular mouth. We cleaned them out on canning spices and had two more of the 41.5 quart canners. Moira bought up the possibility of a trip to Illinois.

"Why would you want to go to Illinois?"

"We found scopes and AN/PVS-27 night vision that we can mount on a rail, if the rifles had rails."

"Barstow?"

"Yes, Frank, we stopped there on the way back. Salt Lake took a hit and so did Lost Wages. We got gas masks and filters for trade goods, replaced the Mk211 we shot up and got M67s and M72s."

"Jeez, we're going to start WW IV right here in Prescott."

"I hope not. Coming down I-15, the ash was awfully thick. I suspect that Long Valley did in fact erupt. I can't be sure because most of I-15 runs south of Long Valley. Lost Wages was an ash filled ruin, we didn't even slow down, except where we were forced to."

"About this trip to Illinois, are you sure you want to make it?"

"I am Daddy. It's about time I began pulling my own weight around here and there's no rule that says all of the attacks have to come during daylight."

"Okay. Lay out what you want planted where and we'll get the fields ready and the crops in if the soil is warm enough. Jeremy or Chad can till the garden spot and Shelia and Ashley can move the plants from the greenhouse. How long do you figure on the trip to Illinois?" "I'm guessing it's about 1,600 miles one way. Figure 8 days travel time and a day there. We might even pick up some of their handguns."

"Get all the 20-rounders you can find."

"I'll get the ammo too, they test fire every rifle and handgun."

"Do you think you'll find any?"

"I'm not sure; maybe we pull the trailer behind the pickup."

"Maybe you should take the HEMTT and pull the M1095. We could put several drums of fuel in the HEMTT and you can keep the tank filled. You'll need to refill the tank at least 10 times unless you make side trips."

"Will we need to make side trips?"

"That all depends on what you find. If you go through Des Moines, stop and get some frozen Maid Rite meat and breaded pork tenderloins, I haven't had either since the last time I was in Iowa."

"What is a Maid Rite?"

"It's a hamburger made with crumbled hamburger and various spices. A breaded pork tenderloin is actually usually a piece of thinly sliced pork loin pounded flat and breaded. I think their corporate headquarters is somewhere in Des Moines, check the Yellow Pages, if you have time."

The trip took us to I-40 then east to Tucumcari, New Mexico where we picked up US 54, later US 400 which took us to Wichita, Kansas where we picked up I-35. That took us to Kansas City, which like Wichita, we had to bypass. Then it was on to Des Moines. Des Moines hadn't been hit so we found a phone book and checked out the Yellow Pages. We found a list of Maid Rite restaurants and the Headquarters in West Des Moines. The Headquarters had a stand by generator running on natural gas, I think and the frozen food was still frozen. We only had 4 Igloo coolers so we couldn't take much.

Then, we got on eastbound 80 and followed I-80 to Morristown, Illinois, via US 6. Geneseo was at the end of the road and we came in on Main Street. Geneseo was a ghost town. The security at Springfield Armory was nothing to sneeze at but eventually, using a cutting torch I found, we got in. We first loaded all of the boxed up rifles and next the rifles in the rack at the testing range. Eventually, we found what we came for, the cluster rails. We took all they had which was more than a few. They had them for manufacturing and to sell, I suppose. We sort of got carried away cleaning out store items like magazines, slings and their 3rd and 4th generation scope mounts. We could sell/trade those when we sold/traded off the M1As. "I guess that's it. I thought you said we'd find ammo."

"I guess I was wrong. No worries. We have to go right by Rock Island Arsenal. It's on an island in the river between Moline and Davenport."

"What do they have?"

"Three point two million ft² of storage."

"Do tell."

"If they make it there, we can find it, eventually."

"What do they make?"

"Artillery and some small arms. I don't think we'll find much there. However, the Lake City Ammunition Plant is in Independence, Missouri. We really should stop there and fill in all of our spare space with 7.62×51mm NATO ammo."

"How does ammo come? I mean is it loose, on stripper clips or belted?"

"Yes to all of the above. They make everything from 5.56mm to 20mm."

"Will it be hot?"

"Well, it is east of Kansas City, so possibly. We won't stay any longer than it takes to load a few cases of ammo."

"War War V?"

"Oh, I hope not, we haven't had WW IV yet."

We stopped in Independence and located belted 5.56, 7.62 and .50 caliber. We also took M855 (SS109) on stripper clips and M118LR, boxed. We added a fair quantity of M80 ball on stripper clips due to the limited amount of M118LR. We then headed home.

"Did you check the CD V-715?"

"No, did you?"

"Only after we had everything loaded. It was reading 3R/hr."

"How long do you figure we spent there?"

"About 4 hours, it was hard to find everything because it was so spread out."

"I don't think that 12R will make much difference Moira."

"Could we just drive straight through to home?"

"Tired of being on vacation?"

"No, I just want to get home, pronto."

"You're going to have to drive part of the way."

"Okay, I drive during the daylight and you drive during the dark."

It was around 2pm and Moira drove until dusk. We stopped had some macaroni and cheese and Spam sandwiches then I took over driving. She was sound asleep in minutes and I refilled the tanks and headed on down the road. I cleared Tucumcari and was near Grants by dawn. I let her sleep, at least until I had to stop and fill up a third time.

"Where are we?"

"We just passed Winslow."

"The snow is melting off well. How much further?"

"About 150 miles. I can drive the rest of the way if you'd like."

"I'm hungry."

"Let's stop and fix two of those Mountain House Omelets, refill the tank, empty our other tanks and we can be home in 3 hours."

"Daddy will be happy we got the Maid Rite."

"Have you ever eaten one?"

"No, have you?"

"I haven't had either of the two items we picked up. I'd never heard of Maid Rite until your father mentioned it."

"I can remember Mom trying to make breaded pork tenderloins but they didn't come out as expected. She never tried again."

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"We're here."

"I must have dozed off."

"You were asleep right after we took off."

"Hey guys, any trouble?"

"Got a little radiation when we stopped at Lake City Ammunition Plant."

"How much?"

"We didn't have our dosimeters, but the reading was 3R/hour and we were there about 4 hours."

"I don't suppose you got any Maid Rites, did you?"

"We got two coolers of Maid Rite and two coolers of breaded pork tenderloins."

"You just made my day. How did you do at Springfield Armory?"

"We took what was boxed ready to go plus what they had on the test range. The latter were the Loaded model with the rail. We took all of the rails we could find plus every magazine they had, especially 20-rounders. We can pretty much arm a couple of companies of soldiers with M1As."

"What now?"

"I think we'll take it easy for a couple of days and rest up from the two trips. I'm also more concerned about that small dose of radiation we got than I'm letting on. It was a full body exposure of about 12R give or take. However Frank, there had to be a little radiation just about everywhere we went. We were in Geneseo for half a day and Des Moines for 3-4 hours finding the Maid Rite headquarters. We should have taken the dosimeters."

"Any symptoms? Petechiae, bleeding gums, nausea, vomiting, excess fatigue, any-thing?"

"We're tired but we did a lot of driving in the past few days. I guess I have a stiff neck from looking over my shoulder a lot, does that count?"

"As well you should, people would kill to get some of the things Moira and you picked up."

It Doesn't Get Any Better Than This – Chapter 9

"I know and so does my neck. I'll get her to put on a glove and rub some Icy Hot into my sore muscles. Everything okay around here?"

"First, we're done with the planting and everything we planned to plant this year is in. We did wheat and soybeans last year and you had seed set out for corn and oats this year. That means next year will be the two kinds of beans, pinto, great northern plus canola for canola oil."

"You should write that down in case someone forgets, Frank."

"Other than getting the crops in, we got jars, and man, I mean we got jars. People got hungry and started to take us up on the offer of two silver dimes for 2 jars and 3 lids. I think we got around 1,500 in addition to what you picked up in Utah. I take it you're not going back there?"

"Not until things turn around, we took their jars, lids, canning spices and more canners. About all they have left to sell are pressure canners, cold pack canners and the miscellaneous stuff they had left."

"What were they like to deal with?"

"Nice people. Good businessmen. Plus, they weren't nosy and I liked that."

"What do you plan to do with the rifle you got?"

"Everyone can have their pick from the selection we picked up. There are plenty of the factory magazines to replace those T-57s. After that, I think we'll start in Prescott Valley and sell them to anyone who can afford one."

"How much are you going to ask for them?"

"A rifle, 10 20-round factory magazines and a sling for 2 ounces of gold. Ammo will be one ounce per thousand of the M80 and an ounce and one-half per thousand of the M118LR."

"You've got that much?"

"Ten ton truck and five ton trailer."

"Where are the dru... oh I see, tied down on top of the trailer. Good thing they weren't a snake."

"How's the garden doing?"

"The plants that are coming up from seed are just emerging. We didn't lose anything that we started in the greenhouse. What was it like up in the Great Plains?"

"Kansas won't be growing wheat, or lowa and Illinois corn. I doubt seriously that all of the snow will melt. The good news is they won't get any floods and the bad news is they either have to move south or starve. We didn't see many, if any, people so I presume many of them have already moved. I'd say they'll have to go to Arkansas to find weather like what lowa used to get. Nebraska will be much the same as lowa and Minnesota and the Dakotas could well be building glaciers."

"But you don't know?"

"Not for a fact, no; we never got further north than Des Moines on that leg of the trip. If I were to base what I said on the Utah leg, I couldn't tell you anymore because Hyrum is at the same Latitude as Des Moines about 41°N."

I wasn't being humble, just honest. Glaciation was pure speculation on my part, but both Hyrum and Des Moines had been colder than a witch's you know what. We'd had time to observe the effect of the war and the Supervolcano. I rather supposed that it was plural as in Supervolcanoes, but still didn't have absolute confirmation. However, we'd had several radio reports from the Fresno area and from Cheyenne area and both indicated that the Supervolcano was in their state. It could take easily 25 years or more for the air to completely clear.

With that in mind, we began offering to give away heirloom seeds to anyone who wanted them, including the heirloom varieties of the field crops. The cluster rails for the M1A only fit the Loaded models and everyone elected to take one of those. We had captured 3 Super Match rifles as spoils of war from one of the earlier confrontations. We had enough to outfit everyone with one and did so. We reserved enough of the Loaded with the cluster rail to equip all of the children and some more, just in case.

The remainder were sold off as planned, first in Prescott Valley, next in Chino Valley and finally in Prescott. I suppose when it was said and done we had gained around 360 one ounce gold coins or the equivalent in silver. This was our money, Moira's and mine. We had run the risk and used our time to gather what we sold. The farm sales were family property to be divided 3 ways, after Jeremy, Chad, Bob and Sam and their wives were paid, some in food and some in silver. A person would have to sell a lot of green beans and other farm output to equal what we got from those gun sales.

Unfortunately, the double whammy coming all at once had unimaginable effects. Many of the survivors had gone rogue, resorting to looting and other forms of theft. Remember, there's a distinction between looting/stealing and salvage. As we had amply demonstrated on our trip to Hyrum, where the owner was present, we paid, mostly in gold and silver; legally acquired gold and silver. We sold all of our produce that was put up for sale including some of the leftover prior year's production, until we ran out.

"We're only going to do this two crops a year plan until next year. It's more work, but it was a bad idea Phil."

"We could go back to six crops next year Dad."

"We could, but I prefer to see it through. We are going to need to go shopping though; we're going to run out of diesel sooner than we thought."

"How low are we?"

"Not that low, but we could use two tankers just to top off. Each generator burns about 10,000-gallons a year, even these newer, more efficient generators. You/we failed to consider how much diesel were use in the tractors."

"But Dad, we recovered extra tankers."

"Well, there are some things you can never have too much of like..."

"Toilet paper and ammunition."

"And fuel for your generator. I'll admit they don't run that often, but they do run and when they do they can use up to 2.6 gallons per day."

"How do you figure?"

"Zero point eleven times twenty-four equals two point six-four gallons per day and one point two times twenty-four equals almost twenty-eight point eight gallons per day."

"Oh, I must have been thinking about the no load situation. Sorry."

"It doesn't matter so long as the wind blows or we have sunlight, but even now the PV panels are only putting about $\frac{2}{3}$ of their rated wattage. Therefore, like it or not, sometime the generator runs."

"But, the wind..."

"Doesn't always blow and that's just as true today as it was before the war and the Supervolcanoes."

"So you agree with me that both calderas probably erupted?"

"That's the way it seems to be Phil. Anyway, stop and think about it, we have a total of 7 generators running, some at full power at least part of the time, thus the need for a load of diesel. Want me to go with you this time to look for a load?"

"Yes, please, Moira needs her rest and time to get reacquainted with our kids."

"You weren't gone that long."

"It seemed like it, that's about the first overnight away from the girls and Johnny."

"The girls didn't miss you, Sheila and Ashley kept them too busy. As long as the baby got his bottles and his diapers changed right away, he was happy. I even helped out once or twice and burped him."

"How did that work out?"

"Fine, once I put on a clean shirt."

"I noticed he doesn't do it with Moira, but when I burp him, I usually need a shirt change too."

"Where do you want to look for diesel?"

"At the risk of picking up a little radiation, I think we should each drive a tanker-trailer to Phoenix and pick up 16,000-gallons each from the fuel depot. If I recall correctly, it was warm not hot, maybe 125mR/hr. Figure 4 hours tops to fill the tankers and trailers, probably less. We can dump the PRI-D and anti-gel in before we leave and it should be well mixed by the time we get home. We can use one tanker-trailer to top off all the tanks and make a second run down with only a single tanker-trailer and have 32,000-gallons of spare fuel. I don't know how much fuel went through the deport on a daily basis, but considering the size of Phoenix and the volume of truck traffic on I-10 and I-17, it had to be quite a bit."

"We've picked up what, 4 tanker trailer rigs?"

"Yes, the two from Prescott and the two on I-17."

"And they each hold 16,000-gallons, right?"

"Right. Are you going somewhere with this?"

"Be patient. What if we took enough batteries and stabilized fuel down to Phoenix for three more trucks?"

"Assuming we could get the trucks to run, we could bring back a total of 112,000-gallons of diesel."

"That's what I thought. Now, if we made the second run with two tanker-trailers, it would give us full tanks and 128,000-gallons of diesel."

"There's nothing wrong with your math."

"So we wouldn't have to go back to Phoenix except once a year, probably for a tankertrailer load, maybe two. We'd have enough backup fuel for several years, just in case, right?"

"Is that what you want to do, stockpile diesel?"

"If we could find one extra tanker-trailer we could also store 16,000-gallon of gas. I have more than enough PRI-G, but I'm not sure I have enough PRI-D or anti-gel. 144,000-gallons would take 72 gallons each of D and Flow plus 36 gallons of Ocide. I only have 10 cases left of the D and the anti-gel. There are only 6-gallons per case. Think we can find more cases? We'd need 2 cases of D and anti-gel."

"I don't know, but if we can find 2 cases of each, we should to be able to find more than that. Who knows, maybe the depot carries some so they can stabilize fuel for stations with low volumes."

"Now, there's a thought. I say we risk it and if we have to, we can look around Phoenix and try to find more."

I looked in my old 2007 West Marine catalog. They had two locations in Greater Phoenix, one in Phoenix and one in Tempe. The third was in Lake Havasu. They only carried pints but 12 gallons is only 96 pints or probably 4 or 8 cases. Their price was out of this world, but I didn't really plan on paying for it unless I had to. I also realized that McMillan was next to Sky Harbor and they sold the Tac-50, McCann night vision rails and Elite Iron Suppressors.

"I found two West Marine stores in Greater Phoenix; let's get some drums filled with stabilized diesel and extra batteries charged. I ran out of ether, we'd better go through Prescott Valley. We need to stop at McMillan and clean out their Tac-50s and supplies."

"If West Marine has PRI products, they'll have starting fluid. They carry the full line?"

"No, just PRI-D and PRI-G."

"Where is Power Research located?"

"Houston."

"Never mind, that's too far to go to get the PRI-Ocide and the PRI-Flow."

"Maybe when we get the fuel squared away, you and I can make a trip to Houston, what do you say?"

"Was Houston nuked or not?"

"Sure was."

"I have to think about it. If we made the trip, how would we get the products blended into the fuel?"

"I had in mind using a pipe and pumping the product to the bottom of the tankers-trailers allowing it to mix in."

"Would that work?"

"Might."

"Okay, we'll see. If we do go, we'd better plan on getting a lifetime supply. We can't keep running around the country like we don't have a care in the world, that's going to get us bit on the butt."

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In summary, here's how it worked out. We filled our tanker trailers because we have enough PRI products for that. We found 6 addition tanker trailer rigs, all empty or nearly so. We tinkered until we got them running and then pulled the new batteries back out. We returned home with the 4 units and all the PRI-D and PRI-G we could find at the two West Marine stores.

We emptied one tanker-trailer (some people call it a trailer-pup). We returned and filled our unit plus four more, Frank was going to drive on this trip. We dropped those at home and made our final trip to Phoenix, bringing back 4 additional units filled with diesel and 2 with gas. We picked up 5 Tac-50s, one in each color, 8 McCann night vision rails, 8 suppressors all the magazines they had in stock. After I figured out where Power Research, Inc. was located, we loaded our protective gear, weapons, water and food and headed for Houston driving the HEMTT and pulling the M1095. It was still hot, too hot and we turned around and went home.

A gallon of PRI-D or G cost \$85 from Battery Stuff, while West Marine wanted \$22.95 for a pint. Eight times \$22.95 (excluding tax and shipping) was \$183.60 and they didn't even kiss you on the way out.

Somewhere along the way, I'd lost count on how much fuel we had, but if we continued to produce biodiesel, we should never run out. One thing that made our trips with the HEMTTs successful was the Ma Deuce in the pintle mount plus our bypassing most large cities. All 8 of the Tac-50s we set up with rails, AN/PVS-27s and suppressors.

Even if we had to run the generators 24/7/365, we'd only burn 10,520 (gallons) times 7 (generators), about 73,640 gallons/yr. Phoenix had about a million gallons. But between the solar and the wind Dad and I agreed we'd probably use around 16,000-gallons a year total; less if we ended up farming with horses.

Everything on the ranch was running smoothly and I decided to go to Prescott Valley and sell a few of the M1As. I took Chad along in case I had trouble. I set up a rifle rack holding 12 rifles, standard and Loaded models with the rail cluster. I also posted a sign saying:

'Springfield Armory Standard M1A rifle; 2 ounces of gold. Includes 10 20-round factory magazines, synthetic stock and leather sling. Firm price.'

'Springfield Armory Loaded M1A rifle; 3 ounces of gold. Includes 10 20-round factory magazines, synthetic stock, leather sling and cluster rail. Firm price.'

'Genuine 147gr Lake City M80 FMJ; 1 ounce of gold per case of 1,000. Firm price.'

'Genuine 175gr Lake City M118LR FMJ; 1½ ounces of gold per case of 1,000. Firm price.'

"Been looting again?"

"Couldn't say, but if I did, it wasn't within your jurisdiction. Mostly, we have more M1As than we can use. How are you today, Steve?"

"Wouldn't mind having a couple of those rifles."

"Sorry, no GSA pricing."

"What kind of condition are they in?"

"How about NIB?"

"You're kidding."

"I'm not kidding, got them directly from the factory for less than wholesale. That cluster rail allows you to mount every description of junk on the rifle including a scope, night vision and a flashlight."

"I'd have to take it up with the County Board."

"Want me to save you two?"

"No promises."

"If I don't have an answer in 60 days, I'll put them back on the market. Here, I brought you something."

"Gordon's? Is that supposed to be a bribe?"

"It's a gift for a friend who likes cheap gin. Or, are you suggesting that you can be bought?"

"Watch it, I am not a crook."

"Where have we all heard that before? Oh, what's his name, the President who resigned? Now if you decide to put together a local militia force, maybe I can arrange a larger discount, say 15% of MSRP."

"What's the minimum purchase?"

"One hundred rifles. I'll even include two National Match rifles (MSRP \$2,249) for your SWAT team at the same price as the Loaded with the cluster rail (MSRP \$2,228)."

"About the only thing we SWAT around here are flies in the summer. What are you going to call the militia?"

"How about you call it the Yavapai County Militia?"

"Let me take it up with the Board. Don't get your hopes too high."

"Okay, but don't be surprised if they're all gone when you want them."

"With the price you're asking, you won't sell many."

"Yeah? Watch me."

There are some people in the world who construe challenges as a dare and refuse to be dared. I didn't like to be dared. Selling off the salvage from the trip to Illinois and Missouri could make us relatively wealthy. Not that we weren't already doing moderately well with two sections of land and the change in the weather. As long as I got the same amount for the rifles and ammo that Steve would pay with GSA pricing, I'd be happy. We had the brochure with the manufacturer's suggested retail pricing as a basis for computing the 15% discount.

"The county only approved two national match and 6 Loaded with the cluster rail. We can buy the good ammo for the rifles, though. GSA pricing, right?"

"Nope, only applies to minimum purchases of 100 rifles. Getting low on both rifles and ammo, best you buy it before it's all gone."

"You're kidding."

"We've sold 8 rifles, so far, with ammo."

"Fine, what's the total?"

"Let's see, eight rifles at 3 ounces of gold per and 8 cases of ammo at 1½ ounces of gold per. That will be 36 ounces of gold. I accept Krugerrands and any official bullion coin although I prefer the 22 carat coins."

It wasn't a lot, but it paid for the diesel fuel we'd burned up; wait that was salvaged too. Make that, it paid for our labor and the risk we took. As time passed the bandits began making an appearance. We assumed that they'd found some place to hole up and eventually had run out of food. They either hit a National Guard Armory or a gun distributor's warehouse. According to the reports, the various groups were well armed.

Steve didn't realize that I'd been doing him a favor by selling those rifles. I gave the discount, with one condition. If called upon by the Sheriff, they would respond as an unorganized militia. That was the law, when we still had laws. The laws these days were still on the books, if you could find the book. What served instead was mostly English Common Law and common sense. We didn't have prisons, hence most offenses were capital offenses or required extensive community service to right the wrong.

"Who did you sell all those rifles to?"

"We sold them to members of the Yavapai County Militia. That was the only condition put on them buying rifles, Steve. If you called upon them as the unorganized militia, they'd be obligated to respond."

"Do your father and Frank agree with this?"

"They should, it was their idea."

"Where do they live?"

"They all live in Prescott and Prescott Valley."

"Did you keep a list of names?"

"Why do you want it?"

"So we can have some training sessions and get some coordination established. There's also a matter of transportation."

"If you get a school bus or two running, we'll contribute diesel."

"You should, considering how much you're getting out of the communities."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"You've sold a lot of food."

"Yes we have and because of it, people didn't starve. We can stop anytime you want and rebuild our reserves."

"Do it and we'll come take it."

"What you mean to say is that you'll try."

"You couldn't stop us if we did, Phil. You said the militia is over 100 strong."

"Yes, I did and it is. We, by contrast are only seven families total, making the odds about 7:1 in your favor. We can deal with those odds and worse. We haven't spent every moment of our free time sitting around reading books. Keep that in mind, friend, should you decide or be ordered to try and take what we have. You will lose and we'll get the rifles back and get to sell them a second time."

"Just what exactly do you have?"

"I won't give you specifics. We have everything you'd find at a well-supplied Army Depot, including missiles, machineguns, land mines, and explosives. Everyone spend a reasonable amount of time on the range to maintain their proficiency. To us, a bad guy is anyone who would try to take what we have."

It wasn't all that long back when he had lectured a group of would be thieves what they were up against. Had he forgotten or was he being pressured? He'd said, "They have Claymore mines, LAW rockets, a .50 caliber and a .30 caliber machinegun. If you'd gotten too close, they could have employed hand grenades. You may notice they're wearing body armor and most are using the M14 rifles. I believe they also have thermal imaging." He was wrong about the thermal imaging, a situation we rectified in Barstow.

Chance favors the prepared mind. That was Travis Dane's take on the famous Louis Pasteur quote. The full quote ran something like, *In the field of observation, chance favors the prepared mind.* We didn't just stop with prepared minds, thanks to Dad's mindset; we were prepared in every way we could be. I felt sorry for people who didn't know someone like Dad who did what he could and inspired others. WW III, in and of itself had been bad enough. The Chinese had only made it about 50 times worse when they nuked the calderas and put over 6,000km³ of ash in the air.

It Doesn't Get Any Better Than This – Chapter 10

We had finally confirmed that both calderas had erupted as a result of nuclear weapons. As this point the only thing not known was who had done it. The majority opinion held that the Chinese had done it because of their limited nuclear arsenal. Combined with the ash and smoke from the other nuclear strikes, the volcanic ash had insured it would take no less than 25 years, and many speculated 50 years, to recover. Snow didn't melt off north of about 42° N and a glacier was believed to be forming. Hams living in Minnesota had all claimed they were moving south.

At best, it would be another 20 years before things returned to normal and that could easily be 45 years, no one knew for sure. Our Chamber of Commerce used to have a pamphlet on their website. It gave a fairly thorough profile of our area. If we had any saving grace, it was the fact that Ruger had a manufacturing facility in Prescott. They had been turning out the Mini-14 rifle in the pre-ranch rifle configuration since the war. And then, they ran out of materials and were forced to close up shop.

"Do you have rifles for all of the kids?"

"No, but I thought about it."

"I got a dozen Mini-14s and a gross of the 20-round magazines. I figure ages 10 and up should have a rifle, but their parents will have the final say."

"Thanks Dad, I should have done that."

"That's okay Phil; you got the ammo they'll need, M855."

"Are they ranch rifles?"

"No, they're the pre-ranch rifle version with a birch stock and aperture sights."

"Couldn't you get synthetic stocks?"

"Not from the factory, but I'm working a deal to get a dozen of the Butler Creek folding stocks."

"Which ones?"

"They're the stocks that permit the barrel to be free floating and to fold to the side. They called them their steel stocks and I talked to a fella in Prescott who brought back a bunch from Phoenix."

"Why did you get 20-round magazines and not 30-round magazines?"

"Ruger hasn't made 30-round magazines in years. They resumed making the 20rounders back in 2008. I got what I could find."

"What did you think of Steve's attitude about coming here and taking our stuff if they decide they want it?"

"He's welcome to try, but I hope they don't. So far we've gotten by fairly well with no one killed. I healed up okay, but I don't want to do that again."

"I'm thinking that we're going to be putting up with this weather for a long time."

"I agree. That's why I think we'll see through the 2 crops per year plan and switch back to 6 crops per year. It will be more work this way, but if we have a bad year, we'll still have some of everything."

"How long is the fuel preserved with PRI products good for?"

"I don't know."

"Do we have enough to last 25 years?"

"We probably have enough for 50 years, if it doesn't go bad, itself."

"Are you sure?"

"Well, we brought back about 15 tons of the stuff. If the air clears like we expect and we get additional solar production, I don't see why not."

"How are we on propane?"

"I just checked the tank levels and stopped by the three propane dealers in Prescott area. They will be by tomorrow to top off all of the tanks. If AmeriGas and Ferrellgas can't provide enough, Flame Propane claimed that they could. Oh, I meant to tell you, we're going to get the cable TV back. Cable One said they'd start broadcasting next week. It will only be local programming, however."

"Can I ask a question?"

"I may not know the answer, but go ahead."

"The last time we heard anything from Washington was when the Defense Emergency was changed to an Air Defense Emergency. Why haven't we heard from them? For that matter, why haven't we heard from the Governor? I know Phoenix was nuked, but for crying out loud, someone in charge must have survived."

"That's a very good question Phil. It's also one that I can't answer. We have seen zero military, zero National Guard, and nothing above County level. Maybe we should consider ourselves lucky that we have people in charge at the County level."

"Right, until Steve starts raising hell, we'll be fine."

"I'm going to attend the next Board meeting and bring that conversation up. I hope he was just having a bad day. I can promise you one thing, if he wasn't, he most surely will."

"Good, I hoped I wasn't just spouting off and lacked backing."

"Frank and I will back you and I'm sure that Chad, Jeremy, Bob and Sam will back the three of us. We can count on all of the wives and any of the kids we can train on the Mini-14s."

"It will be a while before ours are ready."

"I know, but we do have 4 teenagers among the employees' kids. All I can do is ask them about involving their children, and if they say yes, provide the firearms, ammo and training. We'll treat them as adults and give them a share in what we've divided up among the adults. I thought since the parents are getting the food, we should pay them in silver, say 25ϕ an hour. That would equal about \$5.35 an hour. Money goes a lot further now than it used to. It will teach them to save up for something they really want."

If you've ever lived through a major local disaster where the media is limited to reporting local news, you soon learn that it sets standards for being boring. You have to give them credit, they did dig out every VHS, DVD and Blu-ray in their inventory and it served as entertainment. The rest of the time is taken up reporting local events which include, but are not limited to, missing persons, the latest violent acts and special presentations. One example of a special presentation was the two segment report about the Yavapai County Militia conceived and organized by well-known Sheriff Steve Waugh, Prescott Police Chief Randy Oaks and Assistant Chief Mike Kabbel.

It didn't matter who got credit as long as we had a militia. However, none of us on the ranch were invited to join. Now, that was somewhat unexpected. Another good newsbad news situation, we wouldn't be called out for the continuing minor events occurring that the militia was now responding too. The bad news was that not being militia members, we were at the bottom of the list. As I mentioned earlier, the Sheriff had a small local militia earlier; if the truth were known, they were mostly local reserve deputies. Calling a crow an eagle, doesn't make it an eagle.

As we prepared for yet another year of producing a large garden and planting the two final crops, edible beans and canola we learned that we didn't need to spend time double preparing the soil as the ash was now incorporated. We did 330 acres of each edi-

ble bean and 600 acres of canola. To prevent cross pollination, the canola was planted between the two bean crops.

"Next year in addition to planting 6 crops, I think we should double the garden to 10 acres; more if we can get help to harvest it."

"If we play them in food and silver, I think we can get all of the people we need. We might get another school bus like the militia did and provide transportation."

"Good idea, where can we find one?"

"We can find them at any of the 3 schools in the Prescott area, Chino Valley, Prescott Valley or Prescott. Prescott is the closest, so I'll try there first."

"It's funny they never got together and formed on unified school district."

"It was probably considered and rejected because of the travel time involved."

"Who is doing our home schooling?"

"Chad's wife Sharon is a former teacher and is doing it like a one room schoolhouse."

"Have we missed anything? I have an uneasy feeling that we did, but can't put my finger on it."

"We didn't fence our fields but even if we did it using barbed wire and steel posts, I'm not sure we could afford it. That's why I've kept the dry lot down at our place, Phil. How many horses do we have now?"

"We have 8 broken to saddle and four too young to ride, plus the four yearlings. Sixteen, but they won't all be riding stock for three more years."

"I'd really like to get enough tack for all of the horses and equip it with rifle scabbards, saddle bags and lariats."

"Are you planning on issuing lever action rifles and 6 shot revolvers?"

"If I can find them, I wanted to do that very thing."

"The revolvers won't be a problem with Ruger located here. The rifles will either have to be used Winchesters or Marlins. For simplicity, I suggest we settle on one cartridge, the .45 Colt."

"Why not .45-70 for the rifles?"

"Can we get enough .45-70 ammo?"

"Hmm, I'll check it out and if we can't find enough .45-70, we'll go with the .45 Colt. I'd prefer Winchesters even if they demand a premium price because the action is simpler."

Every decision that revolved about major purchases was now subject to discussion that included Dad, Frank and me. In certain circumstances, we included Chad, Jeremy, Bob and Sam. Really major decision also included everyone's wife. When it turned out that we could get large quantities of .45-70 government ammo, all 14 people were involved in the decision. It turned out that the men favored the .45-70 Marlin Cowboy and the women either the Winchester or Marlin as long as they were .45 Colts.

I don't know where Dad found the handguns and rifles, but he had them before he received the Butler Creek folding stocks for the Mini-14s. Prescott is not that far from Mexico and there were all kinds of the tooled Mexican holsters available. Since the shotguns were all pump action, he got scabbards for those too. The saddlebags held ammo on one side and a 72 hour BOB on the other. Everyone had either a Randall knife or one from Cold Steel plus their entrenching tool, a Cold Steel Spetsnaz shovel.

I'll say one thing, our employee benefits were 10 times better than anything else people were receiving. We provide nearly everything our ranch hands needed. Since we didn't have enough horses to ride, we acquired six more from ranchers in the area who were short on feed and desperate to acquire money for food and other uses. The only item we had in extreme quantities was bathroom tissue because we wouldn't trade it off. The other item we wouldn't sell was coffee and the only time we'd sold coffee was up near Nephi, Utah. There were 10 of them and 2 of us.

Coffee was something you simply couldn't get unless you had a greenhouse and provided a peculiar set of sub-tropic growing conditions. Then, you had to harvest and roast it. We knew of no one in the area doing it. We had intended to trade off the Starbucks but changed our minds. It wasn't Folgers but it beat not having coffee. Bob and Sam actually preferred the Starbucks. We got so we were drinking as much tea as coffee.

The day we took our first garden crop to the Farmers Market in Prescott, we were victims of an attempted holdup. They weren't locals because no one local would have been stupid enough to try that. I was driving and Ashley, Sheila and Moira were riding along to handle the sales. We were well armed, never venturing off the ranch unprepared for a battle. A Volkswagen van was pulled across the road and 3 men were behind it, 2 at the front end and 1 at the rear. As I slowed, they fired a warning shot, mistake number 2. Mistake number 1 was trying this in the first place.

I slid to a stop and we piled out of the Ford, rifles in one hand and shotguns in the other. They had poodle shooters, whether A1s or A3s or a clone, with full auto capacity. Those on the right, Moira and Ashley took on the two at the front of the van and Sheila and I took on the lone man at the rear. A FMJ 7.62×51mm round will punch right through the sheet metal the van was constructed of. Three shots brought down the man at the rear

and Sheila and I moved around the back of the Ford to help Ashley and Moira. They didn't need our help and had one man down and a second using his pistol left-handed, having been hit in the right arm. Moira switched to the 590A1 and he went down like he'd been pole axed.

"Those Brenneke slugs really do the job, don't they?"

"I'd better go make sure they're all dead."

"I'll do that," Sheila said. She was carrying her shotgun. Whether or not they were dead wasn't revealed; she made sure the same way Frank had, once upon a time. Then, she crawled in the van, started it up and moved it to the side of the road. The three of us loaded the bodies in the back, having removed the spoils of war. What you might ask did we find? Four, count them four, FIM-92A Stinger missiles. I think I would have passed them up had we not needed to remove them to make room for the bodies.

We secured the missile cases in some chaparral and I drove the van and Moira the Ford into Prescott. I took the van directly to Steve's office and gave him a full version of what happened. I told him that we didn't want the poodle shooters and they were in the back of the van. I didn't mention the 3 HK Mk 23s with suppressors that I secured under my seat of the Ford, nor the $1\frac{1}{2}$ cases of 230gr Speer Gold Dot that I put in the bed of the Ford.

"And you have no idea what they wanted?"

"We have a pickup load of produce; I just assumed that's what they wanted."

"You also had Moira, Sheila and Ashley with you."

"It couldn't be that because we use a different group of people every time we come to the Farmer's Market."

"I see your point. They just had the 3 .223s?"

"That's all I saw. They didn't have much ammo and I left it in the back of the van. I didn't see any food, so perhaps they were hungry."

"I don't get it."

"What don't you get?"

"Why didn't they ambush you instead of trying to rob you?"

"I wondered the same thing myself. I'm afraid I don't have an answer, though. Sheila checked them for vitals."

"It looked to me like whoever checked them shot them in the head with a shotgun."

"It seems to run in the family. The day Dad got shot, I tended to him and Frank checked the guys at the border station. He shot them all in the head with his shotgun."

"I guess that will be 3 less that the militia will have to worry about."

"Do you still have it in your head that if you want to, you can take us?"

"I think we can do it, but we don't plan to."

"Good, don't or you'll rue the day you tried. Who, besides us, provides much food to the three towns? Not only do Dad, Frank and I believe we'd prevail, we wouldn't take it kindly should you try. Just after the war, we had problems with Prescott. If we do again, we cut the town off permanently."

"I'll keep your threat in mind."

"It's not a threat. Consider it a promise."

We sold out quickly and packed up to return to the ranch by 1pm, stopping on the way back to pick up the 4 cases hidden in the chaparral. When we got back, I went looking for Dad and Frank to fill them in on the attempted robbery and the results.

"Stingers? Why would we need those?"

"How about to shoot down aircraft?"

"Right, but what aircraft?"

"The militia's helicopter?"

"I take it you talked to Steve again."

"I delivered the van and bodies and did bring up the issue one last time. I have something for you, wait right here."

"What do you have?"

"Three of the HK Mk 23s used by Special Forces, complete with Knight's Armament silencers. I also picked up 1,500-rounds of 230gr Gold Dot."

"Hefty sucker."

"They are that. The suppressors are supposed to be some of the best for the pistol. I'll take one and the two of you can each have one. I'll give my USP Tactical to Moira. Where do you want to store the Stingers?"

"How about we store two here and two at my place?"

"Okay, but where; in the house, in the barn or somewhere else?"

"Let's keep them handy; how about the front porch?"

"It's been a tough day; I could sure go for a cold beer."

"Pale or dark?"

"You have beer, Frank?"

"Homebrew, I'm afraid, but it isn't half bad. I made two batches so we'd have some for Independence Day. It's less than a month away, in case you forgot."

"What's that they say? Time flies when you're having fun?"

"But, are we having fun yet?"

"I think so, the canola and two bean crops are doing well and the garden is producing more than double what we got last year. So far, we're getting by without bringing in any outside help. Since you brought up the idea of doubling the garden early enough, we did it this year and now we have no worries about jars again."

"We won't run out this year Phil, it's next year I'm worried about. We may want to try to limit sales by raising prices just a little."

"That would virtually guarantee that the militia will strike us."

"I don't care son; Steve's attitude is beginning to piss me off. Talk is cheap – except when Congress does it."

"Is that a quote?"

"Someone named Cullen, perhaps?"

"That's it, Cullen Hightower."

One of Hightower's most notable quotes is, *People seldom become famous for what they say until after they are famous for what they've done.* Ironically, Hightower became famous for what he said rather than for what he did.

Sheriff Steve Waugh was very much part of the local government and in many ways had run roughshod over it after the war and the eruptions. No doubt, he had the best interests of the residents in Yavapai County uppermost in his mind. I didn't envy him the job that he had; neither would we kowtow to his demands if they became unreasonable. We discussed the idea of limiting sales or raising prices but the women would have no part of it and the men were divided 4-3 in favor, making the final tally 10 against and 4 for.

We were now doing this often, immediately discussing issues and deciding them one way or the other right away. That let everyone know where their idea stood among the group and whether it was worth pursuing or not. We'd hold the prices for now and sell all we could of our canned goods. We would continue the practice of paying for jars because the price could be added back into the price of the goods.

We weren't bad off since we had a greenhouse with something always growing. We actually had things like fresh lettuce during the middle of the ongoing hard winters. Our small herd of Hereford shorthorns expanded about 30% a year and we were up to 29 breeding cows and two bulls acquired from other cattle growers. The hog operation was run at Dad and Ashley's because they had the room. From our start of 6 sows, we had grown that herd much faster and had 50 sows and two boars. Our last pork sale had amounted to 115,000-pounds of on the hoof pork. We also fed and butchered around 300 chickens 4 times a year.

There was no shortage of food in the tri-city area and some was even being exported to other locations in Arizona. The Sheriff had no excuse to bring the militia to bear against us. If he had, they would have surely lost; we could even shoot down helicopters now. Each growing season saw us increasing our garden area, by about 5 acres, until we were farming 1,200 acres and gardening 60 plus acres. We were forced to hire season-al help and started in Chino Hills and Prescott Valley before finally turning to Prescott. We were thumbing our nose at Prescott, but it was subtle.

Eventually, the Prescott Costco store was reopened as a food retailer by the former store manager. We cut off Farmer's Market sales and sold solely to the store. He agreed to pay 95% of his retail price and it eliminated our risk of being robbed. He also acted as a reclamation center for canning jars, eliminating one of our biggest head-aches.

Those homebrews that Frank made for the Independence Day celebration were really rather good. We went to every tavern or place that sold beer and purchased their empty beer bottles for about \$1 per case. We acquired cappers and caps from a home brewing store and began to market the beer, again through the Costco store. Costco as a company was no more, but many of the large warehouse stores had survived and were eventually taken over by someone, usually as retail food outlets.

"Have a good time Jasmine?"

"Yes Daddy, Grandpa is teaching me to shoot the Mini-14."

"It won't be long before Grace and Johnny join you shooting; your Grandpa bought you each a rifle."

"I did good, I got 9 of 10 shots on the target and half were in the black part."

"It won't be long before you're shooting all of the bullets in a 2" circle."

"Wow."

It had been a long wait for each of them to reach 10 years of age. When Jasmine did, Dad did what he said he'd do and gave her the Mini-14, 12 magazines and I gave her a case of M855 and a cleaning kit. He taught her to shoot; the results of his first attempt are related above.

Moira and I had no more children. It may have been the birth control pills or perhaps the little extra doses of radiation we got occasionally. At the 10 year mark, roughly Grace's 10th birthday, the weather hadn't let up. The growing season over the period had increased by about 5 days. Between Grace's 10th birthday and Johnny's we gained another day.

We had most of the story pieced together about what happened in the war. A Russian submarine commander had violated standing orders and fired a nuclear torpedo on the Truman Strike Group. Realizing they had fired the first shot, the Russians hurriedly launched their ICBMs. China launched 6 weapons at America and the rest at Russia, India and Pakistan. Iran launched on Israel and Israel turned Iran into a glazed glass parking lot. One Iranian warhead wasn't intercepted and took out Tel Aviv.

Israel went to war against its neighbors using conventional weapons but the weather suddenly changed and they were forced to withdraw and batten down the hatches. Prevailing winds took most of the Tel Aviv radiation across the West Bank and into Jordan, northern Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Iran.

We had been hit by Russia and China and approximately 400-500 weapons, depending on who you listened to, hit America. We fired about 425 missiles at Russia and about 25 at China. None of our SSBNs fired a single weapon, having been instructed to stand down before they could launch. Our Aircraft Carriers and their strike forces recovered all living American troops from Iraq, Afghanistan and Korea. Eventually all of our ships returned to their homeports or any operating port they could find. Many ports had been targets and it wasn't an easily accomplished task. They were forced to abandon all equipment in place that couldn't fly.

It Doesn't Get Any Better Than This – Chapter 11

Having first relocated to Cheyenne Mountain, the government eventually moved to Holloman AFB, New Mexico. The weather that paralyzed us paralyzed the government even more. There weren't any internment camps, there wasn't any organized FEMA and they were more than a day late and few MREs short. It was speculated that had we not had the Supervolcano, even one, they might have been able to act. In the event of a GTW, they'd more likely react, but they'd do something. Combine the two and the line in the sand was too far for them to reach, let alone cross.

Hence thirteen years after the day mankind tried to kill the planet, some of us were holding on, barely. It was the consensus of professors from the Prescott Colleges that the eruption of two calderas simultaneously would translate to enough ash and sulfur in the air to create decades without real summers. The conclusion, intended only for local consumption, was soon on most of the ham bands. In Prescott, it is only summer when it's 85° on the 4th of July.

"I have activity at the back of the canola field."

"How many?"

"There are too many to count."

"If they get any closer than 500 meters, bail and move to the loft."

"10-4."

"What's up Phil?"

"Company. Hang on. *Moira, call the Sheriff and report we have a large force coming in across the canola field.*"

"How many?"

"Luke didn't say. He said there were too many to count. Let everyone know we're at DEFCON 1, THREATCON Delta and material condition Zebra."

I knew that was overkill, DEFCON 1 would have been enough, but, what the hell. We moved the HEMTTs so they were facing the oncoming force. Rockets were laid out, grenades procured, extra ammo placed where needed and we occupied the defense positions carved out of the soil sometime earlier. There were 14 adults, 3 teens and my three kids, making our force total 20. I have to give them credit, they weren't amateurs. They had snipers; automatic weapons and what I presumed were SAWS. They leap-frogged their way towards the buildings, exposing only about 1/3 of their force at any given time.

We started out with the Ma Deuces; they had the longest effective range. They started to drop, a few at a time.

The Interceptor may be good body armor, but it doesn't cover everything. We started taking hits, mostly from their snipers, occasionally from a lucky shot. Our opponents were Americans, not some Iraqi who didn't know about body armor. Frank went down first and Sheila ran to help him, getting shot in the process.

"Stay down. Everybody stay down. If someone gets hurt, you'll only get yourself killed if you try to help them. They're close enough, let's go with the LAWs."

Good idea. They had LAWs too. Probably got them from one of the places we found some. Herein, we had the advantage with our fighting positions (foxholes), but not by much. Jeremy was hit and then Bob took a graze but continued fighting. This continued on and on and no Sheriff or Yavapai County Militia. Our call for help had been acknowledged; so, where were they?

Is bigger better? Old TV ad but let me answer it. Bigger is better if you are talking about machineguns. You hit someone with a .50 caliber round and they go down and probably don't get up, even if it isn't a fatal wound. We had enough .50 caliber ammo to fight WW IV and from our viewpoint, we were fighting WW IV.

Eventually, we whittled them down because they were attacking across an open field while we were using fighting positions. The last of their force was the snipers and they faded away, probably to come back and fight another day. Two people were delegated to check on any survivors among the attackers with the order, No Quarter. The rest of began checking on the 20 of us on the homestead.

Frank had a major, non-life threatening, wound once we stopped the blood loss. Sheila was dead. Jeremy would need surgery to remove the bullet. Luke was dead in the barn loft, victim of a rocket. For some reason known only to God, the barn didn't burn. Bob's graze required stitches and most of us had minor wounds or scratches from rocks and debris thrown up when bullets struck near our fighting position. It took some time to identify the remaining casualty because she had taken a direct rocket hit. She was Norma, Jeremy's wife.

Statistically, we had 15% of our force killed and 15% requiring medical care. The rest of us used various home remedies to clean our scratches and apply bandages, mostly Band-Aids.

"Who were they?"

"People from Prescott. You said no quarter and none was given. We have one hell of a bunch of rifles, pistols, revolvers and ammo."

"The Sheriff among them?"

"No sir, we didn't see him."

"Still, I think we'll take Frank, Jeremy and Bob to Prescott Valley. Gather all of the weapons and ammo and store it in the shed."

"Okay. You do know that some of them had the M1A Loaded with the cluster rail, don't you?"

"That tears it; we only sold those to members of the Yavapai County Militia. It also explains why the Sheriff and the militia didn't show up when we called for help."

When a body count of the OpFor was taken, there were 94 bodies. We recognized about half of the people; they had bought food from us, and rifles. Less than half of them had been killed outright, the cleanup finished the rest. Just as Dad was pulling out to take Frank, Jeremy and Bob to the hospital, the Sheriff pulled in lights and siren flashing and screaming.

"What happened here?"

"We were attacked."

"Who attacked you?"

"The Yavapai County Militia. We were attacked by people using guns I'd sold to them."

"Where are the survivors, I want to question them."

"We offered no quarter, they're all dead."

"Now I'll never find out who was behind this. How about you? Any dead or wounded?"

"Three dead and three wounded. They're on their way to Prescott Valley for treatment. One is a minor wound and the others major, but neither appear to be life threatening."

"I get my deputies and we'll gather up their arms and ammo; and then, we take the bodies back to Prescott."

"You can start with the bodies, we have the weapons and ammo, spoils of war."

"You can't do that!"

"Who is going to stop us? You can tell the manager of the Costco store that we're terminating deliveries."

"I'm the law here."

"Fine, why don't you start by maintaining order? Moira's mother is dead, her father is shot; Jeremy is shot and his wife Norma is dead as is their son Luke. Our casualty rate was 30% Sheriff, 30%. Where the hell were you while we were battling for our lives?"

"Trying to round up the Yavapai County Militia, but I couldn't find them."

"You've found them now, or at least most of them. As far as that list of my customers goes, it appears I got back all the M1A rifles I sold, making it meaningless. If you are unable to maintain law and ORDER, we may just take on the job ourselves. Dad said he knew someone with the authority to appoint us as deputy US marshals. Remind you of anything?"

"Tombstone?"

"In the final analysis, Wyatt Earp was appointed a Deputy US marshal and hunted down and killed many of the bunch they called the Cowboys. You're either with us or against us. You'd better make up your mind, and soon. By the way, we've tracked down the National Command Authority. They started out in Cheyenne Mountain and later moved to Holloman AFB, near Alamogordo, New Mexico. We haven't found any competent Arizona legal authority besides you and that that Board in Prescott."

"Why hasn't the federal government supplied help, it's been 10 years."

"Did it ever once occur to you that the federal government can't always save our bacon? Hell, Obama has probably died of old age and Joe Biden is the existing President. We have no information on the government other than where they relocated to."

"He can't be President, we haven't had elections."

"The question of who is the President if we can't hold elections and we have no active Congress to appoint one has never been answered, Steve. Apparently no one in power ever thought we'd see the day when elections couldn't be held and there was no sitting Congress."

"You seem to have thought about it."

"Not me, Dad did. He said that none of his research provided an answer."

"I heard on the ham bands that this could last as long as 50 years."

"Are you just finding that out? That determination was made by some College Professors at the Colleges in Prescott. The long and short of it is that the ash must settle and the sulfur thrown into the Stratosphere has to settle out as acid rain or whatever. Only then will the sky be truly clear. Most of the ash has settled, but have you really notice the color of the air? It's sure not blue!"

"This is almost too much for me Phil. Our local citizens going off the reservation and attacking you, 37 more years of combined nuclear/volcanic winter and only God knows what else."

"There are all kinds of possibilities, an impact event, the poles shifting, some nut case taking one of our harbored SSBNs and launching more SLBMs. What's your take from amateur radio; is it better out there or better here?"

"In general terms, it's better here. Although, in face of this attack, I'm beginning to wonder. Let me say this to you, neither my deputies nor I had any part in this. Had we known, we'd have tried our best to stop it and warned you of what was going down. We've had our disagreements, true; however, I am doing my best to maintain law AND order. By the way, the Board finally approved purchasing M1As from you, but only 2, the national match rifles for a SWAT team I was ordered to organize and train. God help me, I don't even know where to start."

"Are you going to use existing Deputies?"

"Yes, that was my plan."

"I'll include 2 cases of M118LR with the rifles, no charge. We have more, but that will be enough for them to get very familiar with the rifles. Are you open to suggestions?"

"Anything."

"Go to MCLB, Barstow in California. They have some LAV 25s there. The LAV-25 is an all-terrain, all-weather vehicle with night capabilities. It provides strategic mobility to reach and engage the threat, tactical mobility for effective use of fire power, fire power to defeat soft and armored targets, and battlefield survivability to carry out combat missions. It is air transportable via C-130, C-141, C-5 and CH-53 E. When combat loaded there are 210 ready rounds and 420 stowed rounds of 25 mm ammunition as well as 400 ready rounds and 1200 stowed rounds of 7.62mm. There are 8 ready rounds and 8 stowed rounds of smoke grenades. A supplementary M240E1 7.62mm machine gun can be pintle-mounted at the commander's station in the turret. The LAV-25 is fully amphibious with a maximum of 3 minutes preparation."

"How are they armed?"

"They have a M242 25mm chain gun and two 7.62×51mm M240s, one coaxial and one pintle mounted. For a drive train, they have full time 4 wheel drive (rear) and selective 8 wheel drive. The Corps had about 400 of the vehicles."

"Can we get everything we need?"

"I don't know that, but you can surely get ammo for the guns. We can supply fuel at a reasonable price."

"Okay, we'll recover some of those and the ammo they require. If nothing else, they'll make really good SWAT vehicles."

"One other thing. The next time we call for help, don't waste your time looking for help. Just load up all your available Deputies and beat feet out here. We won't call if we think we can handle it. They had us outnumbered about 5 to 1 and were using snipers. This wasn't an unorganized group randomly trying to find some food. It was thoroughly organized and we paid for it."

"Give my heartfelt sympathy to Moira and Jeremy."

I wanted tell Steve to do it himself but I held my peace. It would be easy enough to confirm that he tried to round up forces to come to our rescue. It would have to be indirect, having someone from Prescott Valley or Chino Valley make inquiries, but we'd know what the truth was. If the Sheriff had lied, he'd pay big time. A week later, we had our answer, he'd told the truth. He'd also 4 Deputies to Barstow and they'd bought back 2 LAV-25s on a flatbed and two semi loads of ammo and spare parts.

I delivered the two National Match M1As with 2 cases of M118LR as promised and gave the Sheriff 10 magazines per rifle. The weapons were delivered butt first. Had he been lying, they'd have been delivered flashhider first and the only part he would be allowed to keep would be the 175gr bullet. He now had one NM rifle per SWAT vehicle.

Moira was devastated by the loss of her mother and adjusted by spending every moment she could with Frank in the hospital before he was released. They came back home, one at a time, Bob returning the same day as we took him in. Frank was next; they opened him up, removed the bullet, patched up the broken bone and kept him for 5 days. Jeremy was in a coma for over a week. They'd performed emergency surgery, treating his physical injuries, but his injuries ran much deeper than a simple bullet wound. He'd lost not only his oldest son, but his wife. The Sheriff delivered three moderately priced coffins that we used to bury Sheila, Luke and Norma.

Ten days after the battle we got a radio call that Jeremy was awake. They indicated that they hadn't told him what happened to his other family members. Frank, Dad and I went to deliver what had to be devastating news.

"Jeremy, I sorry, Norma and Luke were killed by LAWs rockets. Prescott furnished the caskets and we started our own cemetery out on the ranch."

"Both dead? Who the hell were they; I'm getting some payback for this."

"It was the Yavapai County Militia. We've confirmed that the Sheriff was trying his best to round up a force to come to our aid and he apparently had no part of it. He sent some Deputies to Barstow and acquired two LAV-25s to use as SWAT vehicles. I think I speak for both Frank and Phil when I tell you we're so very sorry this happened."

"Other people killed or wounded?"

"My wife Sheila was killed and I was wounded," Frank replied. "Bob had a graze that was deep enough to require sutures. We lost, or had injured, a full thirty percent of our force. Phil ordered no quarter and they had 94 losses."

"Would the three of you excuse me? I need to deal with this."

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What the Lord giveth, the Lord taketh away. Blessed be the name of the Lord. Easily said, really difficult to live with. The hospital put Jeremy on a medium strength anti-depressant. They kept him for another week before releasing him to our care. Their other two children had filled in to the extent possible for two kids 12 and 13. Dad had given them the Mini-14s and spent most of his time training them. Jeremy wasn't there to object and Norma was... dead. Our policy was that whoever works gets a share, period.

We first supplied all the food Prescott Valley and Chino Valley wanted and only then returned to the Prescott Farmer's Market. We did pickup all of the jars the Costco manager had redeemed. He tried to get Dad to agree to resume supplying his store. Dad told him he'd think about it, but that it probably wouldn't be until the following year.

However, our 60 acres of garden produced far more output than we had the ability to can, both times wise and jar wise. Dad relented and began supplying fresh food to the Costco store. We weren't providing the only food to the tri-cities but were one of the major sources of food for human consumption. As we sold, we also had to buy feed for the livestock because we were not producing enough for our growing herds. We weren't the major meat supplier of beef and produced no lamb however; we had the major share of the pork market.

We were now shipping live hogs to Flagstaff, Holcomb and points in between, plus far off places like Tombstone where a small but prospering MAG was located. Whether or not we were accumulating wealth couldn't be really answered because of our share system with our employees/partners. That was the latest decision; everyone would receive a salary and a share and be treated as limited partners. They'd have some say in the operation of the ranch, but the ranch board of directors, consisting of Dad, Ashley, Frank, Moira and me, would have the final say.

We couldn't form a corporation because to do so would require a government in place in Phoenix. I guess you could say we formed a pseudo corporation that acted like a limited partnership. Call it what you will, it worked. We were now on the way back to the 6 crops of 200 acres each plus the huge garden. Bob and Sam went to Texas with 2 semi tractors and 2 low boys and came back with a commercial sized greenhouse. After har-

vest, we all pitched in and got it assembled, using some hired help from Chino Valley and Prescott Valley. The greenhouse was 200' wide, 300' long and two stories high, a really big sucker. After it was unloaded, they swapped trailers and took off, promising to bring back what we needed to finish off the building.

I had no idea what they were going after; they didn't say and I didn't think to ask until after they left. I hoped it was something that would enhance the greenhouse, like florescent fixtures and grow lights. Perhaps more PV panels or more wind turbines for more juice. It turned out I was half right, they bought back a load of grow lights with suitable fixtures. They also brought back a large 210kw Cummins generator (DSHAD 3-phase) and half a truckload of oil, filters and parts. I don't know how they loaded it; it weighed more than 1½ tons. At full load, it burned 17gph!

We unloaded the generator and let it sit. It would put out right at 602 amps as a standby generator, fully replacing our seven generators presuming they were all in one place, which they weren't. Prescott had wanted generators, would they want this one too? If so, how much were they willing to give up getting it? They bought the DGBB and the DGBC. This one would power many more homes.

"That's it, it's sealed up. We can get the fixtures and grow lights from the trailer and suspend them by chains from the ceiling."

"Do we have enough bulbs?"

"There are 400 fixtures, each holding 4 bulbs. Unless my math is wrong, we'd need 1,600 bulbs, right?"

"Sounds right. How many did you get?"

"Four thousand. Cleaned out a warehouse or three."

"Did you think to get chain?"

"Ten thousand feet of twisted loop chain enough? That came from other warehouses and isn't all the same size, but it should work for our use."

"What sizes did you get?"

"No 4 and no 3. Most of it is no 3 and will support 90 pounds. The no 4 will support 70 pounds."

"Where did you get that?"

"Would you believe Alabama?"

"You shouldn't stray so far from home."

"We only found a little, but figured out where it was manufactured and went to the factory. We didn't have any trouble going or coming."

"Maybe you got lucky."

"Could be. They are located in Vinemont, Alabama; that's in northern Alabama. Apparently they're the largest manufacturer in the US for weldless chain."

"We need to find a 64kw generator to power the greenhouse."

"What's wrong with the one we brought?"

"It burns way too much diesel and we don't need that much power. Sixteen hundred bulbs at 40 watts each is only 64kw. If we wire them in banks, we won't have much of a surge either. We need something like a Cummins DGCG which puts out around 72kw of prime power and would burn about 5gph at a 64kw power level."

"Your request is our command, we'll be back."

"Wait."

They were already in the semi and heading out the gate by the time I replied. If there was a Cummins DGCG to be had, they'd find it and bring it back. We needed to install the lights and wiring and put in the load center where they would hook the generator into. Since we didn't have the parts, we went shopping in Prescott.

"We have a generator for sale?"

"More salvage?"

"Stop saying that like it's a dirty word. Yes, it's salvage and it's far bigger than anything we need."

"How big?"

"It's a Cummins generator (DSHAD 3-phase) that has various ratings all above 200kw."

"Man, could we use that."

"It burns a lot of fuel."

"How much?"

"Seventeen gallons per hour at full power."

"How much for the generator?"

"Sixty ounces of gold."

"Are you out of your mind?"

"Could be, but that's the price, take it or leave it."

"That's about \$90,000."

"No, that's exactly \$90,000 with gold valued at \$1,500 an ounce."

"Where did you steal it?"

"I don't know, somewhere in Texas. They wouldn't have taken it if it hadn't been abandoned property. It weighs about 1½ tons and must have taken them a while to load. They also salvaged a commercial sized greenhouse and we can increase our production quite a bit through the winter."

"How big is it?"

"Sixty thousand square feet."

"How large was your old one?"

"Eighteen hundred square feet. I haven't thought it through nor talked to Dad, but we may use the old one to grow seed and the new one to grow food."

"Cement floor?"

"No, we left it with a dirt floor. Only the foundation is concrete and we mixed and poured that ourselves using cement we got in Prescott Valley. You can take the purchase of the generator up with the Board (of Supervisors) and if they agree to our price, we'll deliver it."

"And, if they don't agree?"

"We'll keep it and use it as a full system backup. It puts out almost 700 amps and our individual generators put out 100 amps. I can't imagine we'd need it with the wind turbines and PV panels plus our QD 12500s, but we'll have quadruple redundancy. Better to have it and not need it than to need it and not have it."

It Doesn't Get Any Better Than This – Chapter 12

"Sorry, I tried every argument I could think of, but they said no. They seem to think you're profiteering at our expense. I pointed out that you supplied us with a major portion of our food and they still didn't buy it. I said your guys took one hell of a risk getting the generator and they said it was stolen property and they wanted no part of it."

"They order you to return the two LAV-25s back to Barstow?"

"As a matter of fact, they did; how did you know?"

"Baa, baa, they're a bunch of sheeple."

"They're what?"

"Sheeple. It's a contraction of sheep and people. It refers to people who believe the government will save them. Wiki defined it as, *It is often used to denote persons who acquiesce to authority, and thus undermine their own human individuality. The implication of sheeple is that as a collective, people believe whatever they are told, especially if told so by authority figures, without processing it to be sure that it is an accurate representation of the real world around them. The term is generally used in a political or religious sense.*"

"Well, I didn't return the LAV-25s, either. I'll see what we can do to raise the money to buy the generator with private funds."

"If you go private, I'll accept 54 ounces of gold but only because I'm willing to make a personal contribution. That will make the price on the order of \$81,000. Or, you can go for the full amount and I'll throw in some oil, filters and spare parts."

"If it puts out nearly 700 amps, I'll see about getting 7 contributors involved. That would supply 7 homes with nearly a full 100 amps each and would only amount to a little over 8½ ounces of gold each. Maybe one of the upscale neighborhoods, like the one I live in."

"Let me know; I haven't put the word out yet about having the generator available. If I don't hear from you in, say 4 weeks, I'll put it on the market."

"Fair enough, I should know by then."

"What did Steve have to say?"

"The Board doesn't want the generator. He suggested he could get 7 people together to buy it and divide the electricity among seven homes."

"Do you trust him?"

"I went through someone I know in Prescott Valley and they confirmed his account of trying to raise a force to come to our defense."

"That's it? Did you consider he may have been behind it and used the search for help as a cover story?"

"If that's true, and I'm not saying it's not, he went to considerable effort to create a cover story."

"Wouldn't you if you were in the same position?"

I suppose I might."

"All I'm saying is don't be so trusting. This won't be over before most of us die of old age. Moira and you will be the seniors in our family and you probably have grandchildren. I don't know what to tell you about Jeremy except to suggest that as long as he wants a place here, he's welcome."

"Lord knows he paid for his place. We'll keep him on light duty until he's physically healed and get him psychiatric help if he needs it. It is just him and his two remaining children; so they'll probably be his primary focus."

"I gave his kids their Mini-14s and let them choose from the captured weapons for handguns."

"What did they choose?"

"Browning Hi-Powers and 124gr +P Gold Dot ammo."

"Good choice, just enough power with hollow point ammo and easy to handle."

"I agree. I gave them each 7 magazines so they'll have 91 rounds of pistol ammo and 210 rounds of .223. I didn't consult with Jeremy, but he hasn't complained. Did the doctor say how long it would take for him to fully heal?"

"Approximately two months. That's why I put his kids to work at full shares."

"The doctor told Frank six weeks to two months but I thought we should still give him a share."

"In that case, we'll also give Jeremy a full share. The next time I get the bright idea to sell M1A rifles to anyone that we can't be sure won't turn them on us, veto the sale. Moira is having a damned hard time with Sheila's death and Frank's injury. Worse, she nearly blew a fuse when she learned I had Jasmine, Grace and John in foxholes." "Where are you sleeping these days, the sofa?"

"She didn't go that far; however, she has been distant, only speaking when spoken to and giving the shortest answer possible."

"Do you blame her Phil?"

"No, Dad I don't but what recourse did I have? The kids help cut the odds from 7:1 to about 5:1. Even if they didn't hit anyone, they helped keep their heads down."

"Jasmine is 13; do you want me to switch her over to the M1A?"

"Do you think she can handle it?"

"We won't know until we try. If she can, we'll be better off and if she can't we'll wait a year or two and switch all three of the kids to the M1A."

"Plan on teaching them how to use the hand grenades and LAW rockets. You might also consider breaking them in on the machineguns, they're mounted it almost easier to use than a rifle."

"Okay, I'll see what I can do. Audrey and Moira are starting to plant the greenhouse with the other wives help."

Among our collection of M1As were a few SOCOM 16s, SOCOM IIs and Scout Squads. They had shorter barrels, therefore lacked the accuracy of a standard M1A. Given my druthers, I'd had given them all the Loadeds with the cluster rails, a day scope and an AN/PVS-27. I may have mentioned that to Dad because the next time I saw Jasmine and him on the range they were using that combination and she was shooting rather well for it being her first time with the heavier rifle.

"What do you think of the M1A?"

"You mean besides it weighing a ton and kicking like a mule? It's very accurate and Grandpa gave me one with a scope and night vision. He said we'd practice until I could maintain Minute of Angle groups out to 500 meters. What's a Minute of Angle?"

"Expressed in yards, that a spread on 1" in one hundred yards, 2" at 200 yards and so forth, out to the effective range of the rifle."

"A 5" circle at 500-yards? Can that be done?"

"A skilled marksman can do that and better. It's a case where practice makes perfect and your grandpa is a very good teacher. He said that eventually he planned for Grace and John to also have the same setup you have. If you really get good, we might give you a M21 to use instead." "What's that?"

"It's a sniper rifle based on the M1A, except it's very accurate."

"What are you going to do about Mom?"

"For the moment, let her grieve. Your other grandpa survived and he'll be a comfort to her."

"Okay, but who is going to be his comfort?"

"I don't really know. We'll all be there for him, but it's up to him to come to terms with what happened. I'm beginning to think that we need to go back to either Navajo Depot or Barstow and pick up some heavier weapons."

"That .50 caliber machine gun is plenty heavy; I can't even pick it up."

"That not quite what I meant. The Sheriff went to Barstow and came back with 2 LAV-25s. Maybe we should get a couple ourselves. Or something heavier. The LAV-25 uses the Bushmaster 25-mm chain gun."

"What has a heavier gun than the LAV-25?"

"The M1A1 Abrams have 120mm smoothbore cannons."

"Come on Dad, we don't need a tank."

"Okay, then we're getting the LAV-25s. I'll take Chad, Bob and Sam with me. You keep working with that rifle and I see about getting you an M21 if your Grandfather agrees."

"Which grandfather?"

"Both of them."

"Ah, Dad, give me a break."

We had them all ranging from the Scout up to the M25 White Feather. The only problem with the White Feather was that it didn't have backup iron sights. Then again it probably didn't need them. By far the large quantity of any model was the Loaded, now mostly equipped with cluster rails that they came with or we had installed when we got back home. While not quite a match grade rifle, the next model up was in fact the National Match followed by the Super Match, M21 and M25 and the Loaded used the same barrel as the National Match.

For the most part, I stuck with my original Loaded without the cluster rail. I'd put many a round down range with that rifle and it was more like a friend than simply another rifle. I knew that rifle and all of its characteristics. Depending on my mood on any particular day and more especially my mode of transportation, I either carried the P-14 and M1A or the Marlin 1895 Cowboy and a SAA in .45 Colt.

We had enough SAAs or clones to equip everyone; plus extra Marlin and Winchester .45 Colt rifles. Everyone had at least one horse they could call their own although some of the saddles were well used. I chose to ignore the admonition to only carry 5 rounds in the revolver and leave the hammer over an empty chamber. It might give me an edge someday, if I didn't manage to shoot myself first.

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"Steve, how many LAV-25s are there still at the MCLB?"

"I saw three besides the two we took, why?"

"We're under gunned and I decided that we should get two of them. Did you leave any ammo?"

"About 3 semi loads, we couldn't carry it all back."

"We're going after them then. How big of a crew do they require?"

"Three, commander, driver and gunner."

"I might check one other place for more ammo."

"Navajo Depot?"

"Well, you never know, but yes, Navajo Deport for sure."

We actually checked the MCLB, plus Ft Irwin because the Bradley has the same gun and Navajo Depot on the way home. We had 2 LAVs and three truckloads of 25mm ammo plus a few items we'd overlooked, like more Ma Deuces. The LAVs we brought back seemed to be different from those that Steve had gotten. A little checking revealed that we had the LAV-A2, an upgraded LAV-25 that included better armor protection. It was easy enough to switch out the Ma Deuce for the pintle mounted M240, giving us one more leg up. This war would only be over when the last Bad Guy was buried face down under a pile of manure.

I realized that with all that had happened I'd become bitter. I blamed the politicians for the war, the Chinese for the Supervolcanoes and the various groups that had attacked the ranch over the past 10 or more years. Moira was experiencing depression and I talked Frank into taking her to Prescott Valley to see a doctor (a shrink) and get an anti-

depressant prescribed. After the doctor heard the story, he'd prescribed an antidepressant for both of them, Prozac, a SSRI.

It took 3 weeks before I saw an improvement in Moira. One day, she actually smiled about something, but it didn't last long. Frank and she came to accept Sheila's loss and move on with their lives. I believe it may have brought them closer. It was getting close to yet another spring planting. Jeremy wasn't up to long hours in a tractor seat, although he could help with the livestock.

Tending to the livestock was in and of itself a major task. We worked with a Veterinarian from Prescott and let him do the castrations. Each animal was given a series of shots for whatever reason. Dad had kept 10 additional gilts, increasing the breeding herd to 60 sows, although the gilts wouldn't be sows until they'd had a litter of pigs. Ashley kept careful computer records on the herd to insure that the other boar from their sire was used to breed them.

Steve and his neighbors came up with 60 ounces of gold and we delivered the generator, three cases of oil filters, three drums of oil and a few boxes of parts. The proceeds went into the pot to be distributed at the end of the season. Between the new greenhouse, the old greenhouse, the field crops, the huge garden and the weather, which cooperated for a change, we had a bumper crop. It was far too much to can although the Costco manager had redeemed over 2,000 jars.

This year we took temporary labor from all three cities in the tri-city area. Over the course of the summer, in addition to farming, we refilled all diesel and propane tanks and pumped fuel from the gasoline tanker to the farm tank. We took a single tanker to Phoenix to replace the diesel we'd used and added the PRI-D and anti-gel before we filled the tank. It might not seem like much considering how much fuel we had on hand, but we also shopped for coffee, toilet paper, cigarettes and liquor for trading goods. The radiation level was down to around 50mR in the Greater Phoenix area with some hot spots and some areas with no measurable radiation.

We again shopped the gun stores looking for anything we might have missed the last time we looked. About the only thing we found that we'd missed the first time was a shipment of Black Hills 7.62×51mm ammo. It was enough to give us more match grade ammo for the M21s and M25s. We had taken an empty box trailer, just in case and had filled it with the coffee, and such. I don't believe we missed any major grocery stores or warehouses. There was actually enough to fill a second semi-trailer so we filled it and parked it. We returned later that night and retrieved it.

"Is the coffee radioactive?"

"I'll let you know if you start to glow in the dark Moira."

"That's not funny."

"No, Moira, the coffee isn't radioactive. The boxes might have a little residual radiation on them, but the contents of the boxes are just fine. The only thing that worries me is we're going to run out of coffee. We only found 100 cases total and at the rate we drink it, we'll go through that in 20 years, I actually calculated that."

"Did you include what we already had?"

"Oops. Regardless, we'll probably run out in about 25 years."

"Then, I guess we should switch to tea, at least part of the time."

"I like tea, but it makes my mouth feel funny. That's not much of a description, but I don't know how else to describe it. We have a lot of tea after we cleaned out those coffee service companies in Phoenix. I would have thought that they'd have had more of those individual one-pot coffee bags. We have several cases of just about every flavor of Bi-gelow tea. I like the English Breakfast tea, the Darjeeling and the Earl Grey."

"What kind of coffee did you find at the coffee service companies?"

"Most had their own house brand and one of the major brands, usually Folgers. They stocked far more of their house brands than the major brands, probably because it made them more profit. We can use up the house brands, but I'd like to keep what Folgers we found for trips."

"Are we planning on going somewhere?"

"Not at the moment, I was just saying..."

"I knew what you meant, I was teasing."

"Now, about the kids and their firearms..."

"I'd rather not talk about that Phil."

"We have to Moira. Jasmine is rather good with the M1A and I promised that if she gets really good, I'd give her an M21."

"But, they're so young. It doesn't seem like it was all that long ago that they were in diapers."

"I don't like it either. That's why we went to Barstow and picked up the heavy artillery. While not totally bulletproof, the LAV-A2 does have a bigger gun than anything we've had up to this point. I'm reminded of something I read in a PAW fiction story by Jerry D Young. In his story, The Liddy Scenario, he said, *Always seems like people that are anti-gun are more than ready and willing to use them to get what they want.* So, if it means we need a tank, we'll get a tank." "The LAVs remind me of tanks with tires instead of treads."

"That's a good description. The LAV means Light Armored Vehicle, but the A2 has more armor. Jasmine actually asked me a something with a bigger gun and I told her it would have to be an Abrams M1A1."

"Why does everything center on what guns we have and how many different ways we have to kill people?"

"I suppose because of the times we live in. I don't really have any better explanation. When those patriot fiction writers were speculating on how things would be after a major disaster, they recognized a failing of the human character. Sometimes it's easier to take things than produce them. We didn't attack the Yavapai County Militia, they attacked us. We've never attacked anyone; it's always been a case of self defense."

"Maybe we shouldn't be charging so much for our food."

"Give it away? You're assuming that all the labor involved and the supplies we used mean nothing."

"We could sell it at cost."

"How do you determine cost? The cost of the jar? We burn propane to pressure cook the food and prepare it for canning. Would you stop there and just give them your labor? When was the last time anyone in the tri-cities gave us anything for free?"

"The diesel fuel."

"Right after the war and only then because they couldn't figure out how to get it out of the tanks. Don't forget, they claimed 25% of the fuel we recovered."

Moira wasn't a sheeple; but at times, one had to wonder. Her problem, if any, was her generosity and having a big heart. Once we were producing enough food, no one in the tri-cities went hungry. They might not like what we had to offer, but it was good, nourishing food. We seemed to be having problems with potatoes; getting abundant crops of good spuds one year followed by a marginal crop of undersized spuds another. We planted three varieties, Kennebec, Yukon Gold and Russet Burbank. Potatoes were the fourth largest crop after rice, wheat and corn, worldwide before the war.

We did accumulate gold and silver, usually in small quantities. But as with anything, over a period of time, it did mount up. We tried to keep the junk silver in circulation trading it for gold coins when someone had one. The Canadian coins were pure gold and we put those up so they wouldn't lose value due to wear. The Krugerrand and American Eagles were both 22 carat gold and not subject to much wear, if any. We used these for high dollar trades except when the seller demanded Maple Leafs. We were always happy to accommodate the seller, it eliminated having gold locked up in a cabinet.

Initially, the gold and silver went into a small fire safe which we out grew out of after the war. Dad transferred it to a fireproof locking file cabinet in the shelter, silver in the bottom drawers and gold in the top. Even distributing a portion of the income to our employee/limited partners didn't serve to prevent us from accumulating the precious metals, it just slowed it. It should be noted that gold and silver had one big drawback, you couldn't eat them.

The amount of food we could produce using high intensity gardening in a 60,000ft² greenhouse surprised us; weather permitting we made semiweekly deliveries to all of the tri-cities. We used a 24' bob (box) truck with a LAV-A2 as an escort. We didn't experience any additional attempted robberies. We did, however, attract a lot of attention with our LAV-A2.

"That's different from the ones we got."

"Yes, Steve, you got LAV-25s. This is an upgraded model, the LAV-A2. Same armament except the M240 was swapped out and replaced it with the Ma Deuce. The main difference is heavier armor. We also carry a heavier ammo load since we only have a driver and a gunner."

"Am I going to need to get a M1A1 to have you outgunned?"

"Wouldn't do you any good, we'd shop around for a M1A3."

"Well, you don't have a chopper or a pilot."

"You've got me there, we sure don't."

I wanted to retort that it didn't matter because we had 4 Stingers missiles but thought better of it. An underlying tension remained and giving up our ace in the hole wouldn't be the smartest move I'd ever made. Sometimes our bantering reminded me of two kids on a school ground. *My marble is bigger than your marble.*

We had two very good seasons where we had marginally better weather, the temps were up slightly and we had enough rain to grow large crops. What field crops we couldn't use or store were traded off to other growers in exchange for things we needed more of, like hay. Processing two hundred acres of canola to extract the oil and convert it to biodiesel was an ongoing winter project and with the increased amount of sunshine plus the continual wind, we had every diesel tank topped off and unprocessed oil. There wasn't that big of a market for canola oil so we had to find an empty double tanker to hold the extra. The easiest solution was to sell two tanker loads of diesel to the Sheriff and the people in his neighborhood.

That was a bit of overkill because we only produced 25,000-gallons of biodiesel, but they had the storage room and the gold to pay for the fuel. Makes a person wonder, though. The Sheriff had his 8.6 ounces of gold to buy into the generator and his share of the gold to buy the diesel. How much money does a Sheriff make anyway? This is Yavapai County, Arizona not Los Angeles County, California. We sold the diesel for \$4 a gallon, a total of \$128,000 or 85¹/₃ ounces of gold. His share would have been ~12.2 ounces of gold, ~\$18,285. The fuel we sold predated our hiring employees and as such the proceeds weren't shared. The proceeds of any future sales would be shared.

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Perhaps because we had the LAV-A2s we never needed them. They were loaded and test fired but Bushmaster cannon was never used in any of the subsequent attacks. Compared to the attack by the militia, they were all small affairs. Our only two .50 caliber machineguns had been installed on the LAVs and those were used once or twice. With a thought that our armor protection wouldn't withstand 25mm rounds, we went back to MCLB Barstow and brought back reactive armor which was installed on top of the improved outer armor of the LAV-A2.

Time passes and with it Frank, Dad and Ashley also passed. Jasmine, Grace and John are grown up now, married and we have 8 grandchildren. We're both in our sixties and retired. Jeremy eventually remarried and moved to Prescott Valley. Chad, Bob and Sam stayed on and have asked if they can retire here on the ranch.

Over the past 25 years, all of the ash and most of the sulfur have precipitated out of the atmosphere. Our growing season it just a few days short of what it was before the War/Supervolcanoes. Elections were first held to fill state and local governmental positions, followed a year later by federal elections. Oklahoma City is the new national capital. It's not certain, but many feel the MIRV'd nukes that exploded there were intended for Oklahoma City and Tinker AFB and failed to separate properly, with all three striking Tinker.

Joe Biden ended up serving four terms as Acting President. Most feel that, other than poor communication skills during the first years, he did an admirable job. He and his family returned to Wilmington when a replacement was finally elected. Mostly conducted by paper ballot, it took a week or more to count the ballots and declare a winner. Surprisingly, it was another Democrat, a testament to the job he had done.

By the by, Jasmine got her M21 and to this day is a dead shot. We passed on the Super March rifles we had to Grace and John and now use the sole White Feather and a Loaded. Since the attack by the militia, we have mildly strained relations with Prescott. We sell to them, but they're always the last of the tri-cities to receive deliveries. Dad made that decision way back and we never changed the policy. If you're ever in our neighborhood, look us up. Four miles north of Prescott. The ranch with two LAV-A2s sitting in the front yard.

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